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AS ILLUSTRATING

The Church

OF

THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

BY THE

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AUTHOR OF "THE LENTEN FAST"—"THE DOUBLE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH"—"THE EARLY CONFLICTS OF CHRISTIANITY"—"THE CHRISTMAS HOLYDAYS IN ROME"—"THE EARLY JESUIT MISSIONS IN NORTH AMERICA," ETC.

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TO

THE REVEREND

CHARLES COTESWORTH PINCKNEY, Jr.,

OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

Among the most cherished recollections of the past, is one of a morning in the early spring, when two youth stood on the banks of the Potomac, about to separate, as they feared, perhaps for ever. They talked of the pleasant past when their tastes and pursuits had been the same, and of the shadowy future which to them was radiant with all that the imagination could picture.

And so they parted. Years have since gone by. Of the companions of those happy months, some are now scattered over the land, wearily waging the warfare of life, and some are sleeping in their

quiet graves. Seldom have the two friends, who parted in the morning of life, met face to face; yet time has not severed those early bonds, and often have greetings passed between their distant homes, to brighten the chain of brotherhood which bound them together. And now, when the whole length and breadth of the land is about to be placed between them, and they may never meet again in this world, the one would dedicate this little volume to the companion of his early days, as a tribute to that friendship which has been steadfast through youth and manhood, and which, he trusts, may one day be renewed in that land where there shall be no more partings.

ALBANY, ADVENT, 1853.

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PREFACE.

The writer believes that the argument derived from the Catacombs of Rome, in defence of primitive truth, is but little known in this country, and that he might therefore be doing some service by placing it in an accessible form. To most readers it will be a new chapter in the past history of the Church. Hitherto, the descriptions have been locked up in ponderous folios, or foreign languages, with the exception of two or three small volumes published in England. He believes that no work on this subject has ever been printed in this country.

The first writer whose attention was turned to these remains of the past, was Father Bosio. He spent more than thirty years (1567 to 1600) in exploring the Catacombs, penetrating into some of the innermost crypts which had been closed for centuries, and in making drawings of ancient monuments, inscriptions, and paintings. It became the absorbing passion of his life, until, we are told,

"he lived so much in the dark catacombs, that the bright light of the sun was painful to his eyes." Yet he did not survive to see the result of his labors made known to the world, but died while writing the last chapter of his work. His accumulated manuscripts and drawings, with the partly-finished engravings, passed into the hands of Father Severano, who added a chapter of his own, and published the work at Rome, in the year 1632, under the title of "Roma Sotterranea." This work was translated into Latin by Father Arringhi, and published in two very large folio volumes, at Rome, in 1651 and 1659. These publications first awakened the interest of the learned in Europe to the subject of the Catacombs.

In 1702, Fabretti published a collection of epitaphs, under the title, "Inscriptionum antiquarum, &c. explicatio." But the most important work was by Father Boldetti, canon of Santa-Maria in Trastevere, and custode of the Catacombs. It appeared in 1720, in a large folio volume, entitled, "Osservazioni sopra i Cimiterii dei Santi Martiri, &c. di Roma." He too passed more than thirty years in the examination of the tombs and crypts. Bottari then published, in 1737 and 1754, three large folio volumes on Christian art, under the title, "Sculture e pitture sagre, estratte dai Cimiteri di Roma." His companion, Father Marangoni, a laborious Jesuit, also brought out two works con-

nected with the subject, between the years 1740 and 1744.

The next distinguished writer in this catalogue was M. D'Agincourt, an ardent student of Christian archæology, who toward the close of the last century settled himself in Rome, to investigate these relics of primitive days. He intended to stay six months, but, like Bosio, it became the study of his life; and he remained for fifty years solely occupied in collecting and arranging the materials of his work, which did not appear till after his death. It is entitled, "Histoire de l'Art par les Monumens." Among the more modern writers on this subject, on the continent, are Münter, a Danish bishop, M. Raoul Rochette, the Abbé Gaume, and the Abbé Gerbet. M. Perret, a French artist, has recently devoted six years to the study of the Catacombs and their contents, and returned to Paris with the materials for a great work which will soon be published. It will probably, however, relate more to art than to Christian doctrine or antiquities.

In England, the only work of any research is, "The Church in the Catacombs," by Charles Maitland, M. D., published in 1846. There is also a small volume by Charles Macfarlane, Esq., intended, however, only to give a popular view of the outward appearance of the Catacombs, and purposely entering into no theological discussions.

"I have," says the author, "carefully avoided controversial points."

In compiling the present volume, the writer must of course disclaim all attempts at originality. The subject does not admit of it. Having been exceedingly interested in the study of these Christian antiquities, when in Rome in 1845, he has endeavored to impart to his descriptions the freshness of his own recollections. Still, for the materials, he must depend principally upon the voluminous works of those who had gone before him. While "other men have labored," he has "entered into their labors." His great authority has been Arringhi's "Roma Subterranea," of which he believes there is but a single copy in this country. This he has studied carefully, endeavoring to avail himself of the labors of this distinguished antiquarian on the points he has brought forward, and the illustrations he has employed.

To Maitland, also, he must acknowledge his indebtedness. He has pursued somewhat the same plan, and availed himself in some instances of his pages, to procure fac-similes of inscriptions which were not to be found in older works. Often, however, in his study of Arringhi, he has subsequently discovered he had been anticipated by Maitland, and that they had both copied the same inscriptions to illustrate the points brought forward. Believing, however, that this volume may be used by Ameri-

can readers, who would not meet with the expensive English work, he has not thought it necessary, on that account, to alter his manner of treating any particular subject.

This work might have been much extended, but if materially enlarged, it would have defeated the object of the writer. His aim has been, not to attempt the production of a volume displaying antiquarian or classical learning, but a simple and popular view of these great historical facts which in this country are so little known. He has endeavored to present a picture of the early Church in Rome, in the manliness and purity of its faith, that those who are dreaming of Rome as she is in this age, may see that approximation to her, as she now sits upon her Seven Hills, is no approach to the simplicity and truth of primitive times. The dogmas of Trent have placed a "great gulf" between the apostolic Church of Rome, and the modern Church of the popes. Slang ×

To his brethren, then, he commits this volume, as an attempt to aid in that great contest which every year is becoming of deeper interest—the contest between primitive truth and modern innovations. Bunyan, in his day, spoke the popular voice, when he described Giant Pope, as "yet alive, but by reason of age, and also of the many shrewd brushes that he met with in his younger days, grown so crazy and stiff in his joints, that he

× I dont like it

now can do little more than sit in his cave's mouth, grinning at pilgrims as they go by, and biting his nails because he can not come at them." Yet in this age, that power seems to be putting forth new and unwonted efforts, and we may yet have once more to wage that warfare, which three centuries ago was so successfully carried on by the English reformers. And in doing this, we must go back to the early days of the Church, and learn, as far as we can, how the first followers of our LORD thought and trusted and acted. And, we believe, that in accumulating this testimony, it will be found, that not the least important is that which comes from the tombs of the early Roman Christians.

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I.

VISIT TO THE CATACOMBS.

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I.

VISIT TO THE CATACOMBS.

About two miles from the gates of Rome, on that same Appian Way, over whose pavements once the legions of victorious Rome marched on their way to the Capitol, and whose stones were bedewed with the tears of captive princes as they were dragged along to swell the glory of the triumph, stands the church of St. Sebastian. The tide of population has flowed away from it—the dwellers about have fled from the deadly miasma which broods over these wastes—the ruins of their habitations have sunk beneath the soil, as the rank vegetation rose around them—and the church, with its adjoining monastery, stands nothing but a monument of the saint who is said to have suffered martyrdom on that spot.

It was on one of those genial mornings when an Italian winter is rapidly changing to its early spring, that we stood opposite to this time-worn relic of the past. A scene which presented the image of more perfect repose could not be imagined. Around us,

far and wide, stretched the desolate Campagna, till in the dim horizon rose the purple hills of Albano, consecrated on the classic page as having on their slopes the villa of Horace, and the now vanished palace of Mæcenas, where once the princely patron gathered around him the wit and genius of Rome in her most intellectual days. Before us were the broken arches of the Claudian aqueduct, the ruined shrine of Egeria, from which the Nymph and Dryad have long since fled, and the massive tomb of Cœcilia Metella,

> "——with two thousand years of ivy grown,
> The garland of Eternity, where wave
> The green leaves over all by time o'erthrown."

The Eternal city was sleeping in the distance, the still air brought no murmur of its population, and the whole wide landscape gave no sign of life. A beggar was slumbering in the porch of the apparently deserted church, and not a sound broke the stillness, but the droning of some insects which were wheeling around in ceaseless circles in the sunlight. It was a scene to be found nowhere but among the solemn ruins which encircle this "Niobe of nations."

Beneath this church is the only entrance to the Catacombs by which admittance is usually gained. There is another indeed at the church of St. Agnes, but, for some reason, strangers are seldom permitted to enter it. The writer made many attempts while in Rome; but though several times promised admission by ecclesiastics, he never succeeded in effecting it. And such, he has found, was the tes-

timony of all his friends. The only individual he has met with, who was able to inspect the Catacombs of St. Agnes, was the late Thomas Cole, the artist, from whom he once received so interesting an account, as to deepen his regret at his own failure. Mr. Cole represented these passages as being much richer in inscriptions and paintings than those of St. Sebastian, fewer having been removed from their original positions to be placed in the gallery of the Vatican.*

There are also numberless openings scattered over the Campagna for miles, which, overgrown with vines, often prove dangerous to the incautious rider. It was of these that D'Agincourt availed himself, on several occasions, to enter the Catacombs; though without guides or landmarks, the experiment was a dangerous one. Some of them were in existence during the persecutions in early Christian times, and were used as air-holes. They are spoken of in the "Acts of the Martyrs," as *luminaria cryptæ.* Others were probably produced in later ages by the falling in of the ground where the roof of a passage had too nearly approached the

* Professor Weir of West Point, to whom Mr. Cole also gave an account of his visit, has lately confirmed the writer's impressions with regard to the conversation. Among other things, Mr. Cole stated, that he was so impressed with the resemblance of some of the clerical garments, portrayed in fresco, to those now used in our Church, that he commenced copying them, but was prevented from finishing by those in charge of the cemetery. He then attempted at home to sketch them from memory. Unfortunately these drawings have not been found among his papers, and we have given in a succeeding chapter, the only passage in his letters relating to this subject.

surface. Traditions tell us of attempts made to overwhelm these galleries with mounds of earth, in order to destroy those who had taken refuge in their intricacies. But for various reasons the caves near the Basilica of St. Sebastian are considered by antiquarians as having been those first occupied by the Christians, and a portion of these, therefore, is kept open to gratify the interest of the curious.

We entered the church, whose interior seemed as silent and deserted as the exterior. Wandering about from chapel to chapel, no one was to be seen but the mendicant who, awakened from his sleep in the sunshine, followed us in, whining forth his petition for alms in the name of every saint in the calendar. At last, an old monk appeared from the adjoining monastery, and having made known our wish to visit the Catacombs, he furnished each of the party with a light, and led the way down the stone steps into the passages below. How many thousands, for centuries past, have trodden these well-worn steps: the careless and the irreverent, as well as those who went to this cradle of our faith as to a holy shrine! Age after age the sandalled monk has glided over them, and through mediæval times they have rung with the tread of the mailed knight. At the bottom of the stairs, we entered a winding passage which was the commencement of the Catacombs. Here they branch off in all directions, and the contrast to the dark caves is far greater from leaving the balmy Italian atmosphere above. The air is not "the dew of the dungeon's damp," but something far more oppressive. It is hot, dry, and stifling, smelling of earth and dust.

The intricate passages cross and recross, often not more than three feet wide, and so low that we were obliged to stoop. The difficulty of following them is greater from the fact, that they are generally constructed in three stories, so that you constantly meet with steps which ascend or descend. At times, however, they expand into apartments arched overhead, and large enough to contain a small company. On each side are cavities in which were placed the bodies of the dead, and small apertures where lamps were found. But few sarcophagi were discovered here, and these probably date from the fourth century, when persecution had ceased, and more of the higher classes had begun to hand in their adherence to the faith. Before this, no pomp or ceremony attended the burial of the Christians, when their friends hastily laid them in these dark vaults. They sought not the sculptured marble to enclose their remains, but were contented with the rude emblems which were carved above, merely to show that for the body resting there they expected a share in the glory of the Resurrection. Very many of the graves are those of children, and sometimes a whole family are interred together. The cavities were cut into the soft stone, just large enough for the body, with a semi-circular excavation for the head, and the opening was closed with a thin slab of marble.

When for the first time Sir Walter Scott was conducted to the lone and silent city of Pompeii, the only exclamation he uttered was, "The city of the dead! the city of the dead!" We felt how much more appropriately the epithet could be bestowed

upon subterranean Rome. It was, indeed, a most interesting scene, as we followed the old monk with his trailing garments and noiseless tread, through these dark and silent passages. On each side of us were the yawning graves. For a moment they seemed to open, as the taper we carried brought them into the little circle of light, and then, as we passed, they closed again in the darkness. We were wandering among the dead in Christ, who more than sixteen centuries ago were borne to their rest. Around us were the remains of some, who, perhaps, had listened to the voices of apostles, and who lived while men were still upon the earth, who had seen Jesus of Nazareth, as He went on His pilgrimage through the length and breadth of Judea. It was a scene, however, to be felt more than to be described—a place in which to gather materials for thought for all our coming days, carrying us back, as it did, to the earliest ages of our faith—ages when the only strife was, as to who should be foremost in that contest through which their LORD was to "inherit the earth." The holy spirit of the place—the *genius loci*—seemed to impress itself upon all. They were hushed into a reverential silence, or if they spoke, it was in low and subdued tones.

Yet we were glad to ascend the worn steps and find ourselves once more in the church above. We noticed, indeed, that the corners we turned in these intricate passages were marked with white paint to guide us, yet a sudden current of air extinguishing our lights would make these signs useless, and from the crumbling nature of the rock there is

always danger of the caving in of a gallery, or some other accident, which might involve a party in one common fate. We were told, indeed, that no longer ago than 1837, a school of nearly thirty youth, with their teacher, descended into these Catacombs on a visit, and never reappeared. The passage through which they entered, and which has since been walled up, was pointed out to us. Every search was made, but in vain; and somewhere in these labyrinths they are mouldering by the side of the early disciples of our faith. The scene which then was exhibited in these dark passages, and the chill which gradually crept over their young spirits as hope yielded to despair, could be described only by Dante, in terms in which he has portrayed the death of Ugolino and his sons in the tower of Famine, at Pisa.*

There was, a few years since, a singular escape from the Catacombs, by a young French artist, M. Robert, which is still well remembered at Rome. Hans Christian Andersen, in his story of "The Improvisatore, or, Life in Italy," has wrought it up into an exciting scene, and it forms an episode in the Abbé de Lille's poem, "L'Imagination." We can not forbear quoting the version of the latter, from the pen of Mr. Macfarlane:—

"Eager to know the secrets of the place,
The holy cradle of our Christian race,
A youthful artist threads those inmost cells,
And lowest crypts, where darkness ever dwells.
No friend to cheer him, and no guide to lead,
He boldly trusts a flambeau and a thread.

* Inferno, xxxiii., 21–75.

Brave and alone he cherishes his light,
And trusts the clew will guide him back aright.
Onward he goes, along the low-arched caves,
Crowded with martyrs' relics and their graves;
Through palaces of death, by countless tombs,
Through awful silence and through thick'ning glooms;
Yet pausing oft, as walls and slabs impart
Some lesson of the earliest Christian art,
Or some black chasm warns him to beware,
And change his steps, and trim his torch with care.
Onward he goes, nor takes a note of time,
Impelled, enchanted, in this dismal clime;
Thrilling with awe, but yet untouched by fear,
He passes on from dreary unto drear!
The crypts diverge, the labyrinths are crossed—
He will return—alas! his clew is lost!
Dropped from his hand, while tracing out an urn;
The faithless string is gone, and dimly burn
The flambeau's threads. He gropes, but gropes in vain,
Recedes, advances, and turns back again;
A shivering awe, a downright terror next
Seizes his soul, and he is sore perplexed!
He halts, he moves, he thinks, he rushes on,
But only finds that issue there is none.
Crypt tangles crypt, a perfect network weaves
This dark Dædalian world, these horrent caves.
He mutters to himself, he shouts, he calls,
And echo answers from a hundred walls.
That awful echo doubles his dismay,
That grimmer darkness leads his head astray.
Cold at his heart! his breath, now quick, now slow,
Sounds in that silence like a wail of wo!
Oh! for one cheering ray of Heaven's bright sun,
Which through long hours his glorious course hath run,
Since he came here! And now his torch's light
Flickers, expires in smoke—and all is night!
Thick-coming fancies trouble all his sense,
He strives but vainly strives, to drive them thence;
Cleaves his dried tongue unto the drier roof,
Nor word, nor breath, hath he at his behoof;

That dying torch last shone upon a grave,
That grave his tomb, for who shall help and save?
Alone! yet not alone, for phantoms throng
His burning brain, and chase the crypts along.
And other spectres rush into the void—
Blessings neglected, leisure misemployed,
And passions left to rise and rage at will,
And faults, called follies, but were vices still;
And wild caprice, and words at random spoken,
By which kind hearts were wounded, though not broken,
Bootless resolves, repentance late and vain—
All these and more come thund'ring through his brain;
Condensing in one single moment rife,
The sins of all his days, the history of his life;
And death at hand! not that which heroes hail,
On battle-field, when 'Victory!' swells the gale,
And love of country, Glory standing by,
Make it a joy and rapture so to die!
But creeping death, slow, anguished, and obscure,
A famished death, no mortal may endure!
But this his end! our prisoned artist's fate,
He young, he joyous, and but now elate
With every hope that warms the human breast,
Before experience tells that life's a jest;
Full of his art, of projects, and of love,
Must he expire, while creeping things above,
On the earth's surface, in the eye of day,
Revel in life, nor feel this drear dismay!
But hark! a step! alas, no step is there!
But see! a glimmering light! oh, foul despair!
No ray pervades this darkness, grim and rare.
He staggers, reels, and falls, and falling prone,
Grapples the ground where he must die alone,
But in that fall touches his outstretched hand
That precious clew the labyrinth can command,
Lost long, but now regained! O happy wight,
Gather thy strength, and haste to life and light
And up he rises, quick, but cautious grown,
And threads the mazes by that string alone;
Comes into light, and feels the fanning breeze,
Sees the bright stars, and drops upon his knees;

His first free breath is uttered in a prayer,
Such as none say but those who've known despair!
And never were the stars of heaven so sheen,
Except to those who'd dwelt where he had been,
And never Tiber, rippling through the meads,
Made music half so sweet among its reeds;
And never had the earth such rich perfume,
As when from him it chased the odor of the tomb!"

II.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.

II.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CATACOMBS.

It has been conjectured by some writers, that these excavations were commenced long before the founding of the Eternal city by that race who made it famous under the name of Rome. There are traces everywhere of a former mighty people inhabiting these sites, long anterior to the age assigned to Romulus and Remus, when the massive Etruscan tombs were reared, and those temples built in Pæstum, which, two thousand years ago, the Romans were accustomed to visit as antiquities. But they were a people all knowledge of whose language and records has perished. No Rosetta stone has yet been found to furnish a key to the literature of this mysterious race, and their existence is only known by the inscriptions, and sculptures, and vases, dug out of the earth, and filling the museums of Italy, or by their rifled tombs presenting objects of curious study to the antiquarian. We speak of them as the Etruscans, but beyond this everything with regard to them is a blank.

It is supposed that by them these quarries may have been first opened, for there is a massiveness in

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the character of their architecture which enables us at once to distinguish it, even from the earlier Roman. These ancient quarries abound, too, not only at Rome, but at Naples, and through all the south of Italy. They are traced, too, in Sicily, in Greece, in nearly all the Greek isles, and in Asia Minor; and perhaps the celebrated labyrinth in the island of Crete was formed originally by excavations of this kind. But they are never found except in the vicinity of some considerable and ancient city, or near the spot where some such city once stood.

The Romans inherited the domains of this mysterious race, and we find allusions to the Catacombs in their writers long before the Christian era. The great increase of the city in the latter days of the republic, led again to the working of quarries in the immediate neighborhood, to procure the materials necessary for building. The soil of the Campagna rests on tufa and puzzolana, a volcanic, sandy rock, easily quarried, and from its texture well adapted to the excavation of long galleries, while the Esquiline hill was undermined to obtain sand for making cement. These subterranean works were referred to by Cicero in his oration for Cluentius, when Asinius, a young Roman citizen, was inveigled to the gardens of the Esquiline, and precipitated into one of the sand-pits—"in arenarias quasdam extra portam Esquilinam." It was, too, in these caverns, Suetonius tells us, Nero was afterward advised to conceal himself in his hour of danger; on which occasion he made answer to his freedman, Phaon, that "he would not go under the ground while living."

In this way it was that these crypts or galleries were first formed, until the whole subsoil on one side of Rome was in the course of time perforated by a network of excavations, which ultimately extended to a distance of fifteen or, as some say, twenty miles. But when these quarries were exhausted of their original stores, they stood vacant, ready to be appropriated to any other use. And none, of course, would know their intricate windings but those whose hands had formed them, and by whose labor these excavations had been made.

Then came the advent of the Christian faith. The *arenarii*, or sand-diggers, and the workmen in the quarries, were persons of the lowest grade, and cut off by their occupation from the crowds in the busy city, probably formed a separate and distinct community. There is reason to believe, that Christianity found among them its earliest proselytes, for its first followers everywhere were the lowest in the social scale. These "hereditary bondsmen," indeed, scarcely calling their lives their own in this world, would most naturally gladly welcome the hopes which dawned upon them from the world to come. One of the most common figures found portrayed in nearly all these quarries—and which can easily be distinguished from the Christian order of the fossors—is that of a man carrying some implement of labor, often for the purpose of excavation, and wearing the short tunic and scanty dress of the slave. In times of persecution, therefore, the converts employed in the subterranean passages had already provided for them a secure retreat, which also they opened to their brethren in the faith, until

it became the place of refuge of the Roman Church. In addition to this, we learn from a number of testimonies, that the early Christians themselves, as a punishment for abandoning the ancient faith, were often sentenced to labor in these sand-pits. In the "Acts of the Martyrs," we are told, that the Emperor Maximian "condemned all the Roman soldiers, who were Christians, to hard labor; and in various places set them to work, some to dig stones, others sand. He also ordered Ciriacus and Sisinnus to be strictly guarded, condemning them to dig sand, and to carry it on their shoulders." Thus it was that the members of the early Church, and they alone, became familiar with these winding recesses.

We can easily imagine how concealment in these gloomy labyrinths became practicable. The earliest victims selected in a persecution would, of course, be those most prominent in the Church—its bishop, or ministers, or officers.* These, therefore, would at once take refuge in the Catacombs, where the humbler members of the Church, whose obscurity for a time gave them safety, could easily supply them with all the necessaries of life. Springs, too, which still exist in various corridors, and wells—some of which are supposed to have been dug for the purpose of draining parts of the Catacombs—show some of the means by which life was preserved.

* When, in 1809, Napoleon was pressing his demands upon Pius VII., that pontiff, in refusing to comply, said: "I shall make no resistance; I am ready to retire into a convent, or into the same Catacombs of Rome that afforded shelter to the first successors of St. Peter."

And may we not trace in this the hand of a protecting Providence? The Church was about to enter the furnace of affliction, and to be encircled by the rage of the adversaries; here, then, had previously been provided a sure refuge, where it could abide until the storm was overpast. This was the cradle of the infant community. And, perhaps, we may go a step farther, and assert, that while the church in Rome owed much of the rapidity of its triumph to the protection afforded by the Catacombs, by furnishing a place of refuge where the faithful generally had a secure retreat, in later times the lessons taught by these ancient sepulchres must have long served to arrest the progress of innovation, as the Roman Christians beheld recorded, before their eyes, evidences of the faith held "in their fathers' day, and in the old time before them." That the Catacombs were, throughout, well known to the early Christians, is evident; for all parts bear trace of their occupancy. We meet on every side with tombs and chapels, paintings and inscriptions, and for three hundred years the entire Christian population of Rome found sepulture in these recesses.

The "Acts of the Martyrs" relate many attempts made by the persecutors of the early Christians, to trace them in these retreats. But the entrances were so numerous, scattered for miles over the Campagna, and the labyrinths below so complicated, and blocked up in various places, that pursuit was generally useless. Occasionally, however, these efforts were successful, and the Catacombs became not only the burial-place of the martyrs, but

also the scene of their last sufferings. In the time of Cyprian, Xystus, bishop of Rome, together with Quartus, one of his clergy, poured out their blood on this spot; and Stephen, another bishop of Rome, was traced by the heathen soldiers to his subterranean chapel. They allowed him to conclude the service in which he was engaged, when he was thrust back into his episcopal chair, and thus beheaded.*

In the life of this St. Stephen, the first Roman bishop of that name, there are many scenes connected with the Catacombs. It was there that he was obliged to pass much of his time, sending forth the priest Eusebius and the deacon Marcellus, to invite the faithful to come to him for personal conference. There he assembled his clergy and collected the neophytes, to instruct and baptize them. Among his followers was Hippolytus, a Christian of Rome, who had also taken refuge in the Catacombs. His sister Paulina, and her husband Adrias, both pagans, who were intrusted with the secret of his retreat, supplied him with the requisites of life, by means of their two children, a boy of ten, and a girl of thirteen years of age. They were in the habit of repairing to their uncle's hiding-place at stated times, with a basket of provisions. Hippolytus, sorrowing over the heathen darkness of his relatives, sought the venerable bishop, and consulted him on the subject of his painful solicitude. The advice he received was, to detain them on their next visit, in the hope that their parents, alarmed by their absence, would themselves seek them in

* Baronius: Annals, tom. iii., p. 76.

the Catacombs, when a favorable opportunity would be afforded for placing before them the claims of our faith. The expedient was adopted, and when the children next made their usual visit, they were easily persuaded to remain. Their parents, at the expiration of the ordinary interval, became alarmed, and hurried to the cemetery, where they found their son and daughter with St. Stephen, who used all his persuasive eloquence, but apparently in vain, to make them converts to the Christian faith. They retired unbelievers; but the good seed was sown. They returned again, at the request of the bishop, and after repeated meetings, and a course of instruction, they and their children were baptized; and all four, as well as St. Stephen and Hippolytus, were honored with the crown of martyrdom and buried in the Catacombs.*

St. Chrysostom, who although not living in the age of persecution, was near enough to it to receive its traditions in all their original freshness, uses on one occasion an illustration plainly drawn from these scenes. He speaks of "a lady unaccustomed to privation, trembling in a vault, apprehensive of the capture of her maid, upon whom she depends for her daily food."

We have, too, the testimony of Prudentius, who also in a most graphic manner portrays these retreats. After speaking of the care shown by the church in gathering the mangled remains of the martyr Hippolytus, he thus minutely describes the catacomb in which they are deposited:—

* Baronius: Annals, tom. iii., p. 69.

"Haud procul extremo culta ad pomeria vallo,
Mersa latebrosis crypta patet foreis,
Hujus in occultum gradibus via prona reflexis
Ire per anfractus luce latente docet;
Primas namque fores summo tenus intrat hiatu;
Illustratque dies limina vestibuli.
Inde ubi progressu facili nigrescere visa est
Nox obscura loci per specus ambiguum,
Occurrunt celsis immensa foramina tectis,
Quæ jaciunt claros antra super radios.
Quamlibet ancipites texant hinc inde recessus,
Arcta sub umbrosis atria porticibus;
Attamen excisi subter cava viscera montis
Crebra terebrato fornice lux penetrat;
Sic datur absentis per subterranea solis
Cernere fulgorem luminibusque frui.*

"Beyond the rampart, 'mid the garden-grounds,
Darkles a crypt in the sequestered mine:
With tortuous steps, a swift descent and prone,
Dives down into its heart. The cavern's mouth
Lies open freely to the day, and drinks
A light that cheers the shadowy vestibule;
But, in its bosom, night, obscure and vast,
Blackens around the explorer's way, nor yields
Save where, down fissures slanting through the vaults,
Clear rays, though broken, glance on roof and wall.
On all sides spreads the labyrinth, woven dense
With paths that cross each other; branching now
In caverned chapels and sepulchral halls;
But ever through the subterranean maze
That light from fissure and from cleft looks down,
Fruition granting of an absent sun."

There is one inscription over the grave of a martyr, which shows that he was surprised by the emisaries of Antonine while praying in the Catacombs. The date of this event was during the fifth persecu-

* Peristephanon: Hymn iv.

tion, in the reign of the second Antonine (for the first was friendly to the Christians), which began in the year 161. We copy a portion only of the epitaph:—

> "GENVA ENIM FLECTENS VERO DEO SA
> CRIFICATVRVS AD SVPPLICIA DVCTTVRO
> TEMPORA INFAVSTA QVIBVS INTER SA
> CRA ET VOTA NE IN CAVERNIS QVIDEM
> SALVARI POSSIMVS"

"For while on his knees, and about to sacrifice to the true God, he was led away to execution. O sad times! in which sacred rites and prayers, *even in caverns*, afford no protection to us!"

The edicts of the Roman emperors, indeed, often referred to the cemeteries as places of worship. Such was the case when Æmilianus, a præfect of Egypt during the persecution under Valerian, issued an edict, one sentence of which was—"Moreover, it shall no longer be lawful for you or for others to hold assemblies, nor to enter the cemeteries, as they are called." Orders to the same import were sent forth by Maximian, on the renewal of the Diocletian persecution, forbidding the Christians to meet in the Catacombs. The attempt however proved futile, and the followers of Christ still found a refuge in their accustomed places of meeting, until the adherents of the old religion, under the government of Hilario, were so exasperated that they demanded the destruction of the Catacombs.* No effort was made, however, to carry this into effect, peace came once more at the close of the Valerian persecution, and when the Empe-

* Tertullian, Ep. and Scapulam, cap. 5.

ror Gallienus sent forth an edict, declaring that the ministers of the faith might perform the customary duties of their office with freedom, particular reference is made to the Catacombs which had been seized by his officers. He grants permission to the bishops, "to recover what are called the cemeteries."* So well known at this time had become these caves as places of Christian worship. Even after the general establishment of Christianity, as late as the year 352, during a temporary persecution by the Arians, Liberius, bishop of Rome, took up his abode in the cemetery of St. Agnes.

"To our classic associations, indeed, Rome was still, under Trajan and the Antonines, the city of the Cæsars, the metropolis of pagan idolatry—in the pages of her poets and historians we still linger among the triumphs of the Capitol, the shows of the Coliseum—or if we read of a Christian being dragged before the tribunal, or exposed to the beasts, we think of him as one of a scattered community, few in number, spiritless in action, and politically insignificant. But all this while there was living beneath the visible, an invisible Rome—a population unheeded, unreckoned—thought of vaguely, vaguely spoken of, and with the familiarity and indifference that men feel who live on a volcano, yet a population strong-hearted, of quick impulses, nerved alike to suffer or to die, and in numbers, resolution, and physical force, sufficient to have hurled their oppressors from the throne of the world, had they not deemed it their duty to kiss the rod, to love their enemies, to bless those

* Eusebius: Hist. Eccles., lib. vii., cap. 13.

that cursed them, and to submit, for their Redeemer's sake, to the 'powers that be.' Here, in these 'dens and caves of the earth,' they lived; here, they died—a 'spectacle' in their lifetime 'to men and angels,' and on their death a 'triumph' to mankind—a triumph of which the echoes still float around the walls of Rome, and over the desolate Campagna, while those that once thrilled the Capitol are silenced, and the walls that returned them have long since crumbled into dust."*

Thus, three centuries passed by, and Christianity emerging from these recesses, walked boldly on the soil beneath which she had so long been glad to seek concealment. Then, for a time, the Catacombs were places which the Christians, now living in security, visited with reverence, as the scenes of their brethren's sufferings. St. Jerome thus speaks of them in the middle of the fourth century: "When I was at Rome," says the monk of Palestine, "still a youth, and employed in literary pursuits, I was accustomed, in company with others of my own age, and actuated by the same feelings, to visit on Sundays the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs, and often to go down into the crypts dug in the heart of the earth, where the walls on either side are lined with the dead; and so intense is the darkness, that we almost realize the words of the prophet, 'They go down alive into Hades.' Here and there a scanty aperture, ill deserving the name of a window, admits scarcely light enough to mitigate the gloom which reigns below; and as we advance through the shades with cautious steps, we are for-

* Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*, vol. i., p. 4.

cibly reminded of the words of Virgil: 'Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.—Horror on all sides, even the silence terrifies the mind.'"*

But these crypts became more than places to be visited by the curious with melancholy interest. When "the calamities were overpast," and the true-hearted needed no longer for safety to "wander in dens and caves of the earth," reverence for these dark abodes which had been the scenes of the sufferings and constancy of those from whom they had inherited their faith, was witnessed in their still continuing to be selected as places of sepulture. Compelled, no longer by the rage of the adversary, to spend their lives in these gloomy retreats, they turned to them in the hour of death, and enjoined that their last resting-place should be with the martyrs in this *terra sancta.* Popes and prelates, kings and queens, emperors and empresses, the highest in rank and the most devout in life, or most penitent in death, were for some centuries interred in these crypts, in the neighborhood of the tombs of Roman slaves and criminals, Christian laborers and hewers of stone, and the early martyrs. Even from the remote parts of Europe, the bodies of illustrious persons were carried thither for sepulture, as, a few centuries later, princes and nobles commanded in their wills, that their bodies, or, at least, their hearts, should be carried to Palestine and buried in the Holy Land. The following are a few of the illustrious dead who were inhumed in the Roman Catacombs during the Middle Ages:—

* Hieronymus in Ezechiel, cap. xl.

Anaclitus, fifth bishop of Rome.

Pope Leo I.

Pope Gregory the Great, who first undertook the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.

Popes Gregory II. and III.

Pope Leo IX. He died A. D. 1050, and was the last pope buried in the Catacombs.

The Emperor Honorius.

The Emperor Valentinian.

The Emperor Otho II.

Cedwalla, a king of the Western Saxons.

Conrad, a king of the Mercians.

Offa, a Saxon king.

Ina, a king of the Anglo-Saxons, with Queen Eldiburga, his wife.

The Princess Mary, daughter of Stilicho, and wife of the Emperor Honorius.

The Empress Agnes.

The unfortunate Charlotte, queen of Cyprus.

The celebrated Countess Matilda, who lived in the twelfth century, and to whom the Roman see was much indebted for the increase of its wealth and territorial possessions.*

But it was not long after the firm establishment of Christianity as the religion of the state, that the flood of barbarian invasion rolled over Italy, when neither works of art, or holy places, or consecrated churches, were respected by their rude northern conquerors. When the army of the Huns under Attila, and then that of the Goths under Totila, were gathered about the walls of Rome, pressing its siege, they ransacked the Catacombs and tore open the graves, in the hope of finding buried treasures. And these were followed by the Lom-

* This list is given by Macfarlane, p. 35. He has taken it from that of the Abbé Gaume, *Les Trois Romes*, v. iv., p. 39. Arringhi has also devoted a chapter to this subject, in which he gives substantially the same catalogue: "De imperatoribus ac regibus, qui apud Vaticanum sepulturæ traditi sunt."—Lib. ii., cap. 9.

bards and Saracens, and other devastators. Each added to the desecrations, until the Catacombs were necessarily deserted by the Christian population of Rome. Burials ceased in the crypts, and services in the chapels, until the neglected caverns were left to bats and obscure birds and beasts, or became the hiding-places of runaway debtors, thieves, and banditti. The Roman peasants avoided them in dread, or when, on their way to and from the market-places of the city, they were obliged to pass the mouths of the caverns under the Esquiline mount, they did so in companies, hurrying by with trembling steps, as they muttered a prayer, or chanted a psalm or Hymn.

Then came the tumultuous times of the Middle Ages, when the country was surrendered up to the warfare of factious nobles and an unruly populace, when often, for long seasons, all was utter anarchy, and in the language of Dante —

> "Never was Romagna without war
> In her proud tyrants' bosoms."

Every tomb and monument was turned into a fortress, and the visiter to Rome can still see about them the remains of these mediæval battlements. The Frangipani held the massive arch of Janus Qudrifons and the Coliseum; the Orsini, the tomb of Hadrian, and the theatre of Pompey; the Colonna family, the mausoleum of Augustus and the baths of Constantine; the tomb of Cæcilia Metella was converted into a fortress by the Savelli and the Gætani; the ruins of the Capitol were held by the Corsi; the Quirinal by the Conti; and the Pantheon by the garrison of the popes.

It was not to be expected therefore that the Catacombs should escape the same desecration. The contests of the feudal retainers of these warlike nobles penetrated even to these secluded caverns, conspiracies were arranged in their dark recesses, and armed insurgents assembled there, to wait for reinforcements from the neighboring towns and villages, and for the fierce banditti from the mountains. During that long contest between the powerful families of Colonna and Orsini, the combats between their vassals and retainers took place, not only on the Esquiline mount, but also in the caverns beneath. The awfulness of the spot, the dread presence of the departed, and the emblems of religion, imposed no restraints upon the furious combatants, but often these dark passages rang with the rival war-cries—"The Colonna! the Colonna!" and "Beware the bear's hug!" So too was it when Sciarra Colonna seized Pope Boniface and made him prisoner in his own palace. He had called down from the mountains of the Abruzzi, and his other fiefs and castles in the Apennines, bands of fierce retainers, who arrived in small parties, and to prevent suspicion concealed themselves in these caverns until their leader could summon them forth at the moment for action.

Nor was the case different when in the next age the papal court was removed to Avignon, during the seventy years which Petrarch calls "the Babylonian captivity." Then, a darker ruin gathered about the Imperial city. The country around was inundated, and the stagnant waters, mixed with decomposed vegetable matter, evaporated under

the intense summer sun, until the whole neighborhood of the city, where the openings of the Catacombs were situated, became a prey to the most deadly malaria. At certain seasons these passages were occupied by shepherds and their flocks, while spending the winter months in grazing on the wide-spread Campagna, but ordinarily they seem to have been the resorts of robbers and felons. This is the testimony of Petrarch:—

> "They are become like robbers' caves,
> So that only the good are denied entrance;
> And among altars and saintly statues,
> Every cruel enterprise seems to be concerted."*

Amid the revolutions caused by the efforts of Cola di Rienzi, "the last of the Tribunes," the Catacombs are again mentioned as places of muster and concealment, and one of the old chroniclers tells us, that when the final hour of the Tribune had come, and the furious populace were gathered against him, being advised by some of his friends to take temporary refuge in the Catacombs, he answered, as Nero had done thirteen hundred years before, that "he would not bury himself alive."

Yet even in the darkest times, when most persons shunned the Catacombs as places of danger, there seem to have been some who, moved by piety or curiosity, occasionally visited the few crypts which were most accessible, and left behind them, on the walls or tombstones, brief inscriptions, hastily and

> * "Quasi spelunca di ladron son fatti,
> Tal ch' à buon solamente uscio si chiude;
> E tra le altari, e tra statue ignude,
> Ogni impressa crudel par che si tratti."
>
> CANZONE, XI.

slightly cut, to record their visits. Thus we find in one place, a few words denoting that a Bishop of Pisa and his companions had been there at the beginning of the fourteenth century; and in another place are traced the names of six individuals—German names, Latinized—with the sign of the cross after each name, and the date, A. D., 1397, underneath them all. On one of the early Christian tombs, too, were found a palm-leaf worked in silver, and a small coronet of silver, gilded and inscribed with a name, and the date 1340. They had been concealed and preserved by the pozzolano and earth falling upon them and burying them. In another crypt was found this inscription, with the date 1321 above it, and the names of three visiters beneath it: "Gather together, O Christians, in these caverns, to read the holy books, to sing hymns to the honor of martyrs and the saints that here lie buried, having died in the Lord; to sing psalms for those who are now dying in the faith. There is light in this darkness. There is music in these tombs."*

It is evident that, during these ages, these sanctuaries of the ancient Church were gradually forgotten. The mouths of most of the Catacombs were blocked up by the accumulation of rubbish, by the falling in of the tufa and earth over the arches, or by the rapid growth of gigantic weeds, dense bushes, and trees. It required constant use to preserve a knowledge of their intricate windings, and therefore a few only of the principal entrances were

* For many of these facts with regard to the Middle Ages we are indebted to Macfarlane, p. 36.

kept open. Even these gradually became neglected, until the Church scarcely remembered her ancient home. It was not until the sixteenth century that, through the labors of Bosio, the entire range of the Catacombs was reopened, after being untouched for more than a thousand years. They were found to be a vast treasury, rich in memorials of saints and martyrs—an enduring testimony, every page of which bore witness to the truth of Christian history, and recorded in letters "graven on the rock," the trials and persecutions of the early Church. Then, when the revival of letters enabled the learned to profit by the discovery, investigations commenced, which have been prosecuted to the present day, as the question has been agitated, whether Rome shall be permitted to claim identity in discipline and doctrine with these ancient disciples, who have thus bequeathed to us the memorials of their faith and sufferings.

Such is the history of the Catacombs. These dark and gloomy passages once formed the cradle of the Christian faith in Europe. As one age of persecution after another drew its dark pall over the Church, it was here that the true-hearted found their place of refuge—their impregnable fortress against the might of pagan Rome. These narrow passages "rang with their hymns of lofty cheer"—here, they were trained for those victories which "wrote their names among the stars;" and when the conflict was over, here their brethren laid them to their rest, in the very spot which had been so often hallowed by their prayers. "And their sepulchres are with us unto this day."

III.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CATACOMBS.

III.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CATACOMBS.

In the account of our visit to the Catacombs, we have somewhat anticipated the general features of these retreats. We will endeavor, however, to give a more particular description, to enable our readers to understand their connection with primitive times, and the nature of the testimony they bear to early faith.

We have mentioned the manner in which these winding passages are excavated from the rock. They are stated by D'Agincourt, to follow the direction of the veins of pozzolano; but this is a point which it would be difficult to prove. Nor can we at this day tell their extent; as the very intricacy of their crossings and recrossings, together with the danger of passages caving in so as to render a return impossible, would be sufficient to prevent their thorough exploration. In the sacristy of St. Sebastian hangs a map of the passages for a few miles, the very sight of whose complicated turnings would be sufficient to extinguish any such wish in one who had a regard for his life. Arringhi, in his

"Roma Subterranea," gives a plan of a portion—that known as the Cemetery of St. Calixtus—which we have copied.*

They are said by some writers to extend as far as Ostia, nearly twenty miles distant.† It is certain that many miles from the Church of St. Sebastian there are openings into the Catacombs, but whether they communicate with those which are entered at that place, it is impossible to determine. The probability is, that all this section of country without the gates of Rome is excavated so as to form a perfect labyrinth of passages. They resemble a subterranean city with its streets and alleys, and so encircle the walls, that they have been called "the encampment of the Christian host besieging pagan Rome, and driving inward its mines and trenches with an assurance of final victory."

In the twelfth century, Petrus Mallius enumerated nineteen of these cemeteries. Another writer, in the next century, counted twenty-one, and in dwelling on their extent, says: "There are Catacombs that run three miles under ground; it was in these that the holy martyrs concealed themselves in times of persecution." In the sixteenth century, Panvini counted thirty-nine, and gave the distinctive name of each; while the latest writer on this subject, the Abbé Gerbet,‡ asserts that they amount

* See Frontispiece.

† "They are continued underground, as is said, twenty miles to Ostia, the port of Rome, at the mouth of the Tiber, in one direction, and to Albano, twelve miles in another."—*Visit to Europe, by Professor Silliman*, vol. i., p. 329.

‡ *Esquisse de Rome Chrétienne*, vol. ii.; Paris, 1850.

to fifty.* This enumeration, however, is very uncertain, as openings into the Catacombs being scattered all over the country, it is impossible to tell whether they are separate excavations, or connected by crypts and galleries.

The character of the Catacombs is always the same, and answers the description given by Baronius of the cemetery of Priscilla, which was discovered in his day near the Via Latina. Speaking of Dion's account of the subterranean passages made by the Jews in Jerusalem, as places of safety, on their revolt against Hadrian, he remarks: "This description of Dion's of the underground passages made by the Jews, is also precisely applicable to the cemeteries once constructed at Rome, in the caverns of the arenaria; which were not only used for the purpose of burying the dead (whence they derive their name), but likewise in time of persecution as a hiding-place for Christians. Wonderful places are these! We have seen and often explored the cemetery of Priscilla, lately discovered and cleared on the Salarian Way, at the third milestone from the city. This, from its extent, and its many various paths, I call by no more appropriate name than a subterranean city. From the entrance onward opens out a principal street, wider than the rest. Others diverge from it at frequent intervals; these again are separated off into narrower ways and blind alleys. Moreover, as is the case in cities, broader spaces open out in particular spots, each like a kind of forum, for holding the sacred assemblies; these are adorned with images of the saints.

* *Macfarlane*, p. 60.

Apertures have likewise been pierced (though now blocked up), for receiving the light from above. The city was amazed at discovering that she had in her suburbs long-concealed towns, now filled only with sepulchres, but once Christian colonies in days of persecution; and she then more fully understood what was read in documents, or seen in other cemeteries partially laid open. From what she had read of these places in St. Jerome, or in Prudentius, she gazed upon them with lively astonishment when she beheld them with her own eyes."*

We have already spoken of the visit of Thomas Cole, the artist, to the Catacombs of St. Agnes. In his recently published works, we find the following account—unfortunately all that he has left—of this interesting passage in his life:—

"I have seen that to-day, which will be a lasting subject of thought—which has made an impression on my mind that can never be effaced—the Catacombs of St. Agnes. I went in the company of Mr. Greene, the consul, Mr. G——, Mr. P——, and the padre, who has the charge of the excavations, and has made a plan of the subterranean labyrinth. The sky was cloudless, and before we entered the gloomy regions of the dead, we stood for some time in the vineyard, gazing at the mountains that rise around the Campagna di Roma. The entrance, about two miles out of the Porta Pia, is by a flight of steps, partly antique, I believe. At the bottom, we found ourselves in a narrow passage cut in the tufa rock. On either hand were excavations in the walls, of various dimensions, which contain the

* Ad. an., 130.

bones of the early Christians. For two hours, we wandered in these gloomy regions. Now and then we came to a chapel. The passages were, in general, about six feet wide, and from five to twelve high, arched, and sometimes plastered. The cells are in tiers, one above another. Many of them were open, and disclosed the mouldering bones of those who flourished in the first centuries of the Christian Church. Others were closed by tiles, or slabs of marble with cement, which appeared with the impressions of the trowel as fresh as yesterday. Here were the remains of the early martyrs of Christianity. You know them by the small lamp, and the little phial or vase which once contained some of their blood. These vessels were inserted in the cement that sealed up their graves. Impressions of coins and medals, the date of the interment, are also to be seen in the cement, with inscriptions marked with the point of the trowel, usually the name of the individual, with the words, 'in pace,' or 'dormit in pace.' What pictures can not the imagination paint here! Yet nothing so impressive as the reality; scenes where Christian hope triumphed over affliction; where the ceremonies of their holy religion were performed far from the light of day. The chapels are generally ornamented with pictures, some of which are in good preservation. They are rudely executed, but with some spirit. One picture represented Moses striking the rock; another, Daniel in the lion's den; another, the three holy children in the fire; and still another, the Virgin Mary. There were several pictures which represented bishops or priests—men

in clerical robes. Occasionally the dripping of the water formed stalactites upon the walls and ceilings. Some of the bones were coated with calcareous deposite.

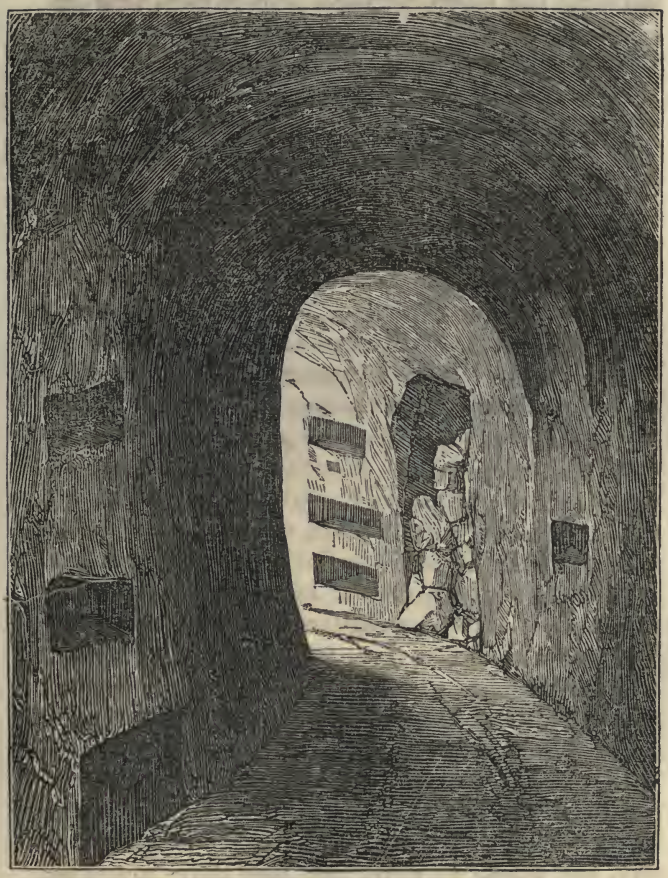
"Some notion of the extent of the Catacombs may be formed from the length of time we were walking. There were many passages we did not enter, and many impossible of access from the rubbish with which they were choked up. We came into the open air—into the light of the glorious sun—and again stood and gazed upon the mountains. There they are, as eighteen hundred years ago; they are not changed. As they looked then, they look now."*

Some of the larger galleries are in height about eight or ten feet, and the width from four to six, but the lateral passages are much more contracted in their dimensions. On each side are the graves cut into the walls, either in a straggling line, or in tiers one above the other, sometimes amounting to six in number. A single glance at the accompanying engraving (for which we are indebted to Maitland), will give a better idea of these passages than an elaborate description.

We have represented, on the opposite page, the opening of one of the larger galleries. The daylight is seen pouring in at the mouth of the cavern, showing the rifled sepulchres.

> "—— The tombs contain no ashes now;
> The very sepulchres lie tenantless
> Of their heroic dwellers."

* *Life and Works of Thomas Cole*, by Rev. L. L. Noble, p. 318.



Beneath the most distant of these is a square hole, which once probably contained a cup. On the right is a lateral passage, blocked up to prevent accidents, so liable to happen to those who might wander away and be lost in these intricate windings.

In some places the passages expand into the apartments mentioned by Baronius, which traditions state to have been intended as places of worship by the proscribed and suffering followers of our LORD. In one of these little chapels, which tradition has thus consecrated, we saw still remaining, a simple earthen altar, and an antique cross cut in the rock above it. It was with no ordinary feelings that we stood on this spot and looked on these evidences of early worship. In this gloomy cavern the followers of our LORD were accustomed to meet in secret to eat the bread of life, and with bitter tears to drink the water of life. What solemn services must this spot have witnessed! With what a depth of feeling must they have heard of the Resurrection, surrounded by the dead in Christ, and the symbols of that hidden and eternal life which lies beyond the grave! How earnest the prayers which were here poured forth by men, whose faith was certain, because they had received it from the lips of apostles themselves, and glowed more brightly because they stood in jeopardy every hour! These relics of their worship may perhaps have remained here unchanged, since the name of Jesus of Nazareth was first uttered as a strange sound in the neighboring city, and where we were, men may have bowed in prayer who had themselves seen their LORD in the flesh. The remains were around us of those who

had received the mightiest of all consecrations, that of suffering, and whose spirits were as noble as any who had their proud monuments on the Appian Way, and whose names are now as "familiar in our ears as household words." But no historian registered the deeds of the despised Nazarenes. They had no poet, and they died.

"Carent quia vate sacro."

A stone chair formerly stood in this little chapel, but it was unfortunately removed to Pisa by Cosmo III., of Tuscany.

The earliest of these chapels, like the one we have just mentioned, were of the simplest form, evidently mere enlargements of the gallery into an oblong or square chamber, often lined with graves on every side. Others, probably of later construction, were more elevated, with a hole pierced through to the soil above for light and air. Some of these openings in the roof are the holes to which we have already referred, as scattered over the Campagna and frequently mentioned in the "Acts of the Martyrs." In one place, for instance, they tell us of Candida, a saint and virgin, who was thrown down the light hole of the crypt and overwhelmed with stones.

When the days of persecution had passed and these places became objects of superstitious reverence, the custom began of ornamenting these chapels with architecture and more elaborate fresco paintings. We are told that, before the year 400, the tomb of Hippolytus had been adorned with Parian marble and precious metals. The roof was

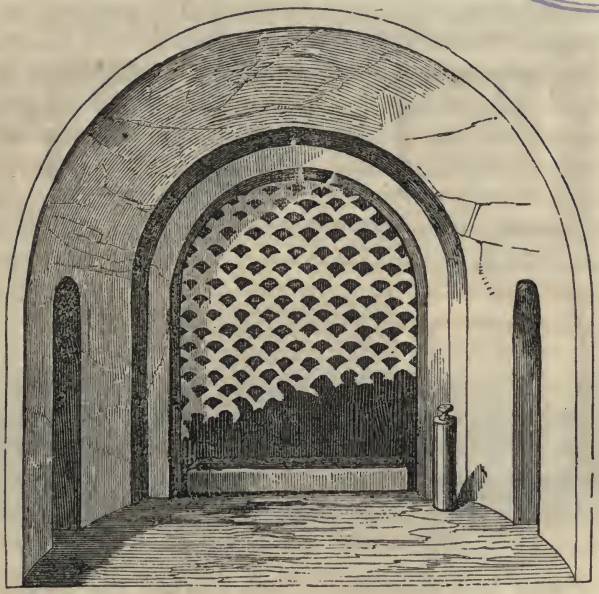
LIBRARY OF THE

extended and vaulted, and the skill of the artist exhausted in representing sacred subjects on the walls. Arringhi has numerous engravings of chapels when thus changed by the taste of later times, one of which we copy, to show at a glance the wide difference between their appearance and that which they bore in earlier days as represented in the last engraving we gave. In this we have instances of the "arched monument"—a grave cut like a sarcophagus from the rock and an arch constructed above it.

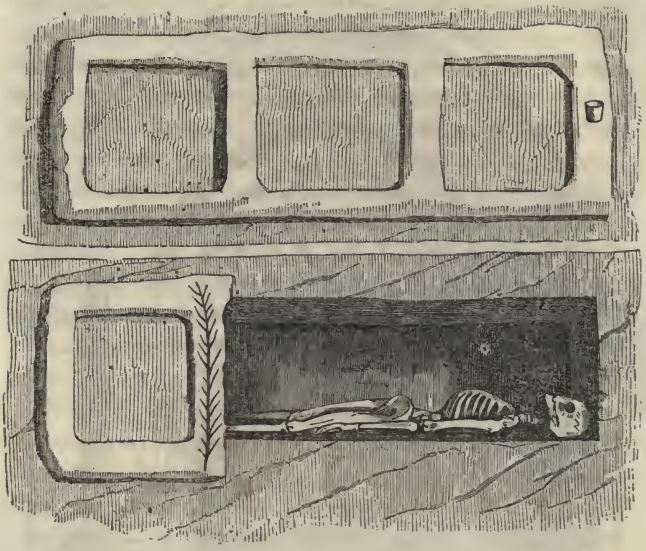
In one case, copied by Maitland, the sarcophagus or case for the body, at the end of the chapel, was separated from it by a cancellated slab of marble, which is now broken.

The largest of these chapels are in the cemetery of St. Agnes. One of them, it is estimated, would hold eighty persons.

UNIVE. OF CALIFORN



The graves were originally closed by a thin piece of marble, often of most irregular figure, or sometimes by slabs of terra-cotta, cemented to the rock by plaster. In the subjoined engravings, copied originally by Boldetti, we have a view of two graves, the first of which is closed by three pieces of cotta, while the latter is partially opened, so that the skeleton lying within can be seen. The palm branch and cup have been rudely scratched upon the stone. It was thus on these slabs, were cut the Christian emblems which the early followers of our Lord so much delighted to use, and there too they scrawled the brief epitaphs by which, in that age



of fear and persecution, they marked the resting-place of the brethren. While everything around speaks of suffering, it tells also of the simple earnest faith of men, with whom the glories of the next world had swallowed up all the pains of their brief mortal pilgrimage.

Our guide pointed out to us, as we passed along, some tombs which had never been opened, and whose inmates had been left to slumber as they were laid to their rest seventeen centuries ago. There was one the thin marble side of which had cracked, so that he could insert a small taper. He bade us look in, and there we saw the remains of the skeleton, lying as it was placed by its brethren

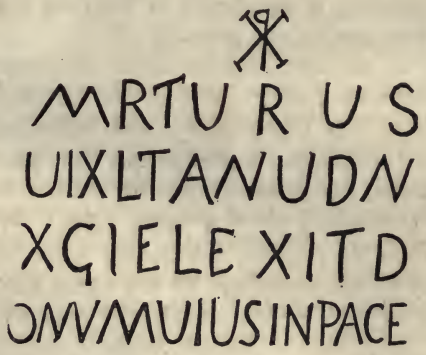
in the faith in those early days of persecution and trial. In some passages are unfinished tombs, which the workmen never completed; and, Boldetti tells us, he found places where sepulchres had been sketched upon the walls, but their excavation never even begun. He states, too, that when some were opened for the first time, in his presence, he perceived an odor like that of spices. And this is in accordance with what we know of primitive usages. That the anointing of the bodies of their friends with "sweet spices,"* to prepare them for their burial, was the custom of the early Christians, we learn not only from Scripture, but at a later day from Tertullian. When answering the objection, that the new religion was unfavorable to commerce, he says: "Is not incense brought from a distance? If Arabia should complain, tell the Sabeans that more of their merchandise, and that of a more expensive quality, is employed in burying Christians than in fumigating the gods."†

There is another circumstance connected with these cemeteries, which we can not but notice. It is the fact, that Christianity first introduced the custom of common burial-places for persons of every grade, and connected with each other only by the profession of the same faith. With the higher class of pagans, sepulchres were appropriated only to the members of the same family—as the tomb of the Scipios, which still remains on the

* Mark, xvi., 1.

† *Apologeticus*, cap. 42. Arringhi devotes an entire chapter to this subject: "Cadavera unguentis, et aromatibus condiuntur." *Roma Subterranea*, lib. i., cap. 23.

Appian Way, not far from St. Sebastian — while Horace speaks with undisguised contempt of the "common sepulchre" which was intended for the dregs of the people. Even the history of each Jewish patriarch generally concludes with the declaration — "He was buried with his fathers." Christianity first broke down these narrow distinctions — introduced a nobler relationship than that of blood — taught that in Christ Jesus all are one; and here we find them sleeping side by side, old men and children, young men and maidens, all claiming brotherhood to each other only in the Church of their Lord. See how in the two inscriptions, which follow, the extremes of life are brought together. The Latinity in the first is so barbarous as to be hardly intelligible, but we give a fac-simile to show what it is. The epitaph is now on the wall of the Lapidarian Gallery.



"Martyrius vixit annos XCI
Elexit domum vivus. In pace.

"In Christ, Martyrius lived ninety-one years.
He chose this spot during his life. In peace."

Then follows one on an infant of a few months—

It is impossible to form any idea of the numbers who are interred in these Catacombs. The earliest date which has been verified, is in the time of Vespasian, that is, not forty years after the crucifixion.

VCVESPASIANO III COS IAN.

There is another epitaph of the same period on an architect, who, after having been in the service of the Emperor Vespasian, was put to death by his order on account of his belief in Christianity.* The earliest Consular date is of the year 98. Another refers to the consulship of Surra and Senecio, which was in the year 107:—

N XXX SVRRA ET SENEC. COSS.

It is an inscription rudely scratched on the mortar which overspreads the mouth of the niche.† There probably, however, are many slumbering around who were interred long before these periods. But from the time that these passages were first used for this purpose, till after the year 400, we know that the whole Christian population of Rome found here their burial-place. At an early period the number of Christians was so great in Rome, as to give rise to complaints that the shrines and temples of the gods were deserted. And yet the Imperial

* *Rock's Hierurgia*, vol. ii., 808. † *Boldetti*, p. 79.

city at this time was peopled by more than one million of inhabitants. We can judge, therefore, how numerous must have been the Christians, and of course the interments, in a city which was open to such a charge. And it was more than a century before these cemeteries were disused for this purpose, that Constantine avowed the Christian faith, from which day we know that the number of its open disciples was necessarily very much increased.

In times, too, of persecution, multitudes were at once hurried to their long home. A single extract from Prudentius, in his hymn, thus sets forth the fact most clearly, as he describes the appearance of the Catacombs in his day:—

"Innumeros cineres sanctorum Romula in urbe
Vidimus, O Christi Valeriane sacer.
Incisos tumulis titulos, et singula quæris
Nomina? difficile est ut replicare queam.
Tantos justorum populos furor impius hausit,
Quam coleret patrios Troja Roma deos.
Plurima litterulis signata sepulchra loquuntur
Martyris aut nomen, aut epigramma aliquod.
Sunt et muta tamen tacitas claudentia tumbas
Marmora, quæ solum significant numerum.
Quanta virum jaceant congestis corpora acervis,
Nosse licet, quorum nomina nulla legas?
Sexaginta illic, defossas mole sub una,
Reliquias memini me didicesse hominum:
Quorum solus habet comperta vocabula Christus.*

"Around the walls where Romulus once reigned,
We see, Valerian, countless relics of the saints.
You ask, What epitaphs are graven on these tombs?
The names of those who there are laid to rest?
A question difficult for me to answer!
For in the olden times of heathen rage,

* Peristephanon: Hymn xi.

"So great a Christian host was swept away,
When Rome would have her country's gods adored.
Yet in some martyr's sepulchre his name is seen,
Or else some anagram his friends have carved.
There too are silent tombs which dumb stones close,
Telling us nothing but the number buried there.
And thus we know how many rest below,
Though names and appellations all are lost.
Beneath one single mount some sixty lie,
Though Christ alone has kept the record of these names,
As being those of his peculiar friends."

Thus it is that now, as we stand in these passages, we feel that around us is a "multitude which no man can number." Little do the dwellers in modern Rome think, that for every one who treads their streets, there are hundreds sleeping in those gloomy caverns, which everywhere surround the Eternal city and perforate the very soil on which it stands. Yet so it is. The ground has been drunk with the blood of martyrs, and the earth on which we tread is rich with the garnered dust of countless saints whose record has utterly perished from the land which was once hallowed by their footsteps.

"—— All that tread
The earth are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom."

IV.

INSCRIPTIONS IN THE CATACOMBS.

IV.

THE INSCRIPTIONS IN THE CATACOMBS.

There is an old Arabian fable, of a city whose inhabitants at once were turned to stone. The maiden at the fountain, the guest in the hall, the listless wanderer in the streets, all were arrested without a moment's warning, and in the posture in which the stroke found them, were transmuted at once into marble statues. And there the city stood in the desert, with the stillness of the grave resting on it, everything unchanged, as age after age swept over it. At last came a chance traveller, and for the first time in centuries its deserted streets echoed to the tread of human footsteps, as he wandered on through palace, and temple, and hall, with none to answer his summons — none to oppose his entrance — gazing in wonder on the memorials of generations which had lived ages before, to the possession of which none had succeeded, and, therefore, they had remained unaltered.

In our day, the deserted cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii almost furnish a reality to this fable. There, we are at once transported back to the first

century of the Christian era. We enter houses which it seems as if the lordly Roman had but just quitted. His paintings, and statues, and manuscripts are about us. The sentinel still stands at the post he dared not leave, even when the burning cinders were raining about him, and the skeleton rattles hollow in his armor, the strigil lies on the pavement of the bath, as the frightened slave dropped it, when he fled, and in the bedroom is the *rouge* with which the faded beauty of Pompeii once restored her charms. We see, on all sides of us, the character of that now forgotten civilization, which spread its charm over these gay Campanian cities. The "great gulf," which separates us from the days of Pliny, is bridged over. The intervening ages are forgotten. We live among those who for nearly eighteen centuries have been dust—we understand each arrangement of their domestic life—and it requires an effort to recall our minds to the realities of the living present.

What these long buried cities display to us of the social condition of the ancients, the Catacombs reveal with regard to the Church of that day. While we often read, in the remains of Pompeii, a commentary on the lines of Juvenal or Horace, in the inscriptions which mark the tombs of the early Christians, we find a confirmation of much that was written by the Fathers of the first three centuries. The same spirit pervades these records graven in the rock, and the earnest words which those leaders of the Church sent forth to cheer their converts in the faith. The two harmonize in tone, and remain

to rebuke the changes which after-ages gradually brought about.

But few of the inscriptions now remain in the accessible parts of the Catacombs. Some years ago, most of them were removed to a hall in the Vatican, which from its containing little besides sepulchral stones, is called the *Lapidarian*, or *delle lapidi*. The side of this long corridor is completely lined with them, fastened against the wall to the number of more than three thousand. The letters on the Christian monuments are generally cut into the stone, and are from half an inch to four inches in height. On some of them, the incision is colored with a pigment, resembling Venitian red. It is to these inscriptions in the stone that Prudentius refers, when in his hymn in honor of the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa, he speaks of washing with pious tears the furrows in the marble tablets erected to them :—

> "Nos pio fletu, perluamus
> Marmorum sulcos ——."

On the opposite side of the same hall are fastened the monumental inscriptions of pagan Rome, gathered from the ruins of the surrounding city. We turn to them, and we have before us the fragmentary records of Rome in her most glorious days. We see the epitaphs of those whose deeds made her history, and who endeavored thus, by the enduring marble, to record their protest against the influence of "Time's effacing finger." And beside these are votive tablets, dedications of altars, fragments of edicts and public documents, all classed

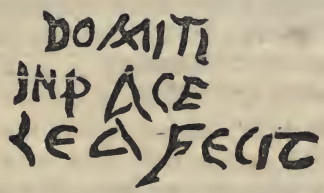
under the divisions of Greek, Latin, and consular monuments.

"I have spent," says Raoul Rochette, "many entire days in this sanctuary of antiquity, where the sacred and profane stand facing each other, in the written monuments preserved to us, as in the days when paganism and Christianity, striving with all their powers, were engaged in mortal conflict. * * * And were it only the treasure of impressions which we receive from this immense collection of Christian epitaphs, taken from the graves of the Catacombs, and now attached to the walls of the Vatican, this alone would be an inexhaustible fund of recollections and enjoyment for a whole life."*

It is interesting to mark the difference between the two sides of the gallery. We are at once transported back through eighteen centuries, and see before us the wide social gulf which separated the adherents of the two religions, when Christianity first went forth to challenge to itself the sway of the earth. On the pagan side we have the pride and pomp of life, when under the old religion the civil and ecclesiastical states were so closely entwined together. There are the lofty titles of Roman citizenship—the traces of complicated political orders, and the funeral lamentations over Rome's mightiest and best—all neatly graven on the marble, and often in hexameters which will bear the scrutiny of the scholar. We see everywhere the evidences of a dominant faith, secure in its position before the world, proud in its authority and resources.

* *Tableau des Catacombes*, p. x.

We turn to the Christian side of the corridor, and how marked the contrast! There are the simple records of the poor, in accordance with no classical rules, appealing to the feelings rather than to the taste, to the heart and not to the head. An incoherent sentence, or a straggling, misspelt scrawl, betray haste and ignorance in their very execution. The Latinity of these epitaphs would shock a cultivated reader, the orthography is generally faulty, the letters irregular, and the sense not always obvious. The first glance is enough to show, that, as St. Paul expresses it, "not many mighty, not many noble," were numbered among those, who, in the first age of our faith, were here laid to their rest. Such is the inscription:—

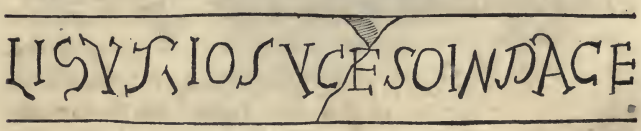


DOMITI
IN PACE
LEA FECIT.

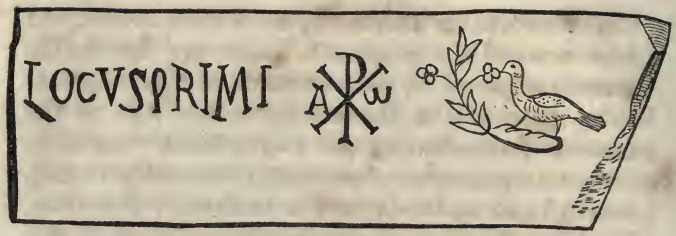
Domitius in peace. Lea erected this.

Roughly carved upon the slab, over which its letters straggle with no attention to order, it tells plainly that it was placed there by the members of a persecuted and oppressed community.

So, too, is it with the following:—



Legurius Successus, in peace.

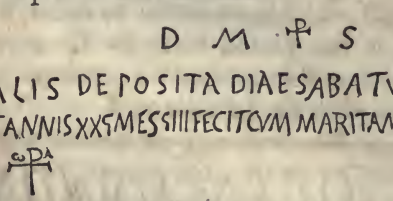


The place of Primus.

Or this, which records the names of three individuals, and bears also the figure of the Good Shepherd, carrying a lamb :—

Septimina, Aurelius, Galymenes.

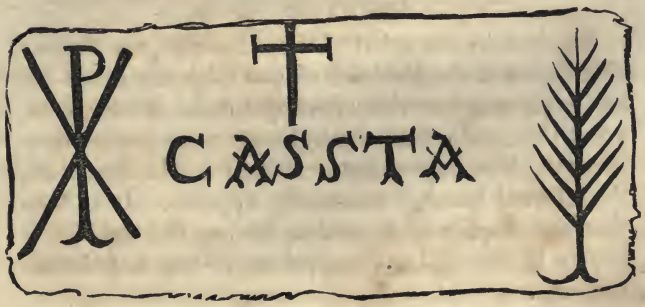
We give the fac-simile of another, where the old heathen formula, D. M., which they used for *divis manibus*, it has been argued, was retained with a Christian meaning as applied to our Lord, and is to be interpreted Deo Maximo :—



Sacred to Christ, the Supreme God.
Vitalis, buried on Saturday, Kalends of August. She lived twenty-five years and three months. She lived with her husband, ten years and thirty days. In Christ, the First and the Last.

There is, too, a simplicity in most of these inscriptions which does not mark the monuments of their adversaries. It is seen even in the names. While those of the Romans consisted of several parts, as "Aurelius Felix," "Quintus Mediolus," or "Victor Septimus Severus," but a single one generally was inscribed on the resting-place of the Christian. This may have happened partly from the fact that the latter in the obscurity of his social position, had but one by which to be designated; but may he not, also, sometimes from choice have confined himself to that which he received at his baptism? With him it was often a matter of principle to drop all that pertained to the distinctions of this world, and voluntarily to abase himself, that he might be more like his master. Such, for instance, are the following:—

Florentius, in peace.



Casta.

Januarius.

Such, too, is the case with the broken tomb, a drawing of which is found in D'Agincourt. The view is the more striking, because when copied by him, the dust was still lying in it, resembling the shadow of a skeleton:—

Valeria sleeps in peace.

But it is in the spirit of these inscriptions that we chiefly mark the contrast of our faith with that old and *effete* religion which it supplanted. No hope beyond the grave sheds its light over the pagan monuments. The expression, "DOMVS ETERNALIS, An eternal home," constantly appears. It is thus that the despair of a mother for her infant child is shown in one of the inscriptions of the Lapidarian Gallery:—

ATROX O FORTVNA TRVCI QVAE FVNERE CAVDES
QVID MIHI TAM SVBITO MAXIMVS ERIPITVR.

O relentless Fortune, who delightest in cruel death,
Why is Maximus so early snatched from me?

Even the noble philosophy of Greece appears to have left no trace in these epitaphs, nor do the glorious dreams of Plato, as he argued on the very verge of truth, seem to have dawned upon the minds of those who, in the Imperial city, thus laid the loved and lost in the tomb. A gloomy stoicism —a forced resignation—is the highest feeling we can discover. They turn to the life which is past, only with Epicurean regret that its pleasures can be enjoyed no longer. Take, for instance, the Anacreontic language in the following:—

D·M
TI·CLAVDI·SECVNDI
HIC·SECVM·HABET·OMNIA
BALNEA·VINVN·VENVS
CORRVMPVNT·CORPORA·
NOSTRA·SED·VITAM FACIVNT
B·V·V·

To the Divine Manes of Titus Claudius Secundus, who lived 57 years. Here he enjoys everything. Baths, wine, and love, ruin our constitutions, but—they make life what it is. Farewell, farewell."

So in this, where life is looked upon as a play:—

VIXI·DVM·VIXI·BENE·JAM·MEA
PERACTA·MOX·VESTRA·AGETVR
FABVLA·VALETE·ET·PLAVDITE.
V·A·N·LVII.

While I lived, I lived well. My play is now ended, soon yours will be. Farewell, and applaud me.

But nowhere can we trace anything but calmness

and peace in the inscriptions of the early Christians. Brief as they may be, they yet evidently look to a life beyond life. We see how immediate was the elevating influence of the new creed. Nothing, indeed, which is gloomy or painful finds a place among these records of the martyrs. They evidently laid the athlete of Christ to his rest, without any sorrow that his fight was over, or any expression of vengeance against those who doomed him to death. They thought too much of his celestial recompense to associate with it the tortures and evils of this lower life. A light had risen to dispel the horror of darkness which had hitherto reigned over the grave; and while the first disciples had before them a view of the Eternal city, it is no wonder they were willing even to rush through the gate of martyrdom, that they might enter the starry portals. Death was to them like sinking to a gentle slumber; and often this is the only idea expressed in their short epitaphs:—

DORMITIO ELPIDIS.

The sleeping place of Elpis.

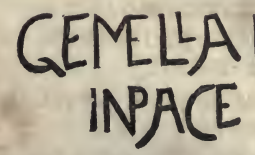
VICTORINA DORMIT.

Victorina sleeps.

ZOTICVS HIC AD DORMIENDVM.

Zoticus laid here to sleep.

Or the following, of which we give a copy:—



Gemella sleeps in peace.

Frequently, too, we find the inscription:—

IN PACE DOMINI DORMIT.

He sleeps in the peace of the Lord.

Sometimes, too, they expressed still more fully their disbelief in the chilling doctrine of the annihilation of the soul, taught by paganism, or the almost equally cheerless picture of an uncertain Elysium, which was the utmost that creed could impart to them. Thus, in a portion of the epitaph which Placus recorded above his wife Albania, he says:—

RELICTIS TVIS IACES IN PACE SOPORE
MERITA RESVRGIS TEMPORALIS TIBI DATA
REQVETIO.

You, well-deserving one, having left your [relations], lie in peace—in sleep. You will arise; a temporary rest is granted you.

The absence, indeed, of every feeling but those of trust and hope, is most remarkable in these epitaphs. No word of bitterness is breathed even against their persecutors, by whom their brethren had been doomed to death. Succeeding generations relied upon distinguishing the tombs of the martyrs, more by the emblems placed over them, uncertain as this test was, than by the words of the inscriptions. In very few cases is the manner of their death mentioned. We believe there is but a single instance of one picturing martyrdom to the eye, and that is the representation of a man torn in pieces by wild beasts. "To look at the Catacombs alone," says Rochette, "it might be supposed that persecution had there no victims, since Christianity has made no allusion to suffering."

And then he goes on to contrast this spirit with that displayed in the adornment of some of the modern churches of Rome: "Perhaps I may be allowed to add, that a series of paintings, like those of St. Stefano in Rotundo [a church in Rome], filled with all the scenes of barbarity which the rage of executioners could devise, or the constancy of martyrs support, honors less the faith which inspires such images, or which resisted such trials, than the paintings of the Catacombs, generally so pure, so peaceful in their object and intention, where it seems that the gospel ought to have met with no enemies, appearing so gentle, so ready to forgive."*

So also another modern writer who has studied the subject with profound attention, says: "The Catacombs destined for the sepulture of the primitive Christians, for a long time peopled with martyrs, ornamented during times of persecution, and under the dominion of melancholy thoughts and painful duties, nevertheless everywhere represent in all the historic parts of these paintings only what is noble and exalted (*des traits heroiques*), and in that which constitutes the purely decorative part, only pleasing and graceful subjects, the images of the Good Shepherd, representations of the vintage, of the Agape, with pastoral scenes; the symbols are fruits, flowers, palms, crowns, lambs, doves; in a word, nothing but what excites emotions of joy, innocence, and charity. Entirely occupied with the celestial recompense which awaited them after the trials of their troubled life, and often

* *Tableau des Catacombs*, p. 194. This work is interdicted in Rome.

of so dreadful a death, the Christians saw in death, and even in execution, only a way by which they arrived at this everlasting happiness; and far from associating with this image that of the tortures or privations which opened Heaven before them, they took pleasure in enlivening it with smiling colors, or presenting it under agreeable symbols, adorning it with flowers and vine-leaves; for it is thus that the asylum of death appears to us in the Christian Catacombs. There is no sign of mourning, no token of resentment, no expression of vengeance; all breathes softness, benevolence, charity."*

The only case in which anything like denunciation is found, is where it is directed against those who should violate the sanctity of the grave. To the early Christians, even this frail tabernacle had acquired a higher value and dignity, when they learned the lesson of the resurrection, and that it was THIS MORTAL which hereafter was to "put on immortality." Precious in their eyes, therefore, became the remains of the saints. They could not burn them upon the funeral-pile, nor would they gather them into an unmeaning urn, for they felt that these lifeless relics had been consecrated to the LORD, and were now to be placed in charge of the Angel of the Resurrection until the end of all things. Therefore it was, that somewhat in the spirit of the Hebrew Psalms, in inscriptions like the following (Arringhi, lib. iv., cap. xxvii.), they recorded their curse against any who should disturb the rest of that body which was one day to be united again to its spiritual partner:—

* D'Agincourt: *Hist. de l'Art.*

MALE PEREAT INSEPVLTVS
JACEAT NON RESVRGAT
CVM JVDA PARTEM HABEAT
SI QVIS SEPVLCHRVM HVNC
VIOLAVERIT.

If any one shall violate this sepulchre,
Let him perish miserably, and remain unburied;
Let him lie down, and not rise again;
Let his portion be with Judas.

Nor was the tone of these epitaphs changed when the days of persecution passed away, and the members of the Church were no longer obliged to conceal their sacred rites "in dens and caves of the earth." No words of gratulation mark the inscriptions they recorded. They seemed in those solemn places to heed the world as little when it smiled upon them, as they did when suffering from its enmity. The Church was a little elated by triumph, as before it had been depressed by adversity.

But how do these things seem to bring us back to the best and purest days of our faith! In these dark caverns, surrounded by the mouldering remains of those, of whom in this life the world knew not, we feel there is a spirit lingering, which partakes more of Heaven than of earth. We have, in the beginning of this chapter, compared this city of the Dead to the recovered relics of Pompeii; yet how wide the interval of interest which separates the two! The ruined streets of the pagan city have been once more opened, and again the sun shines on its vacant homes; yet as we tread where once gathered thousands "lived and moved and had their being," what other sentiment is gratified

but that of curiosity? Everything is "of the earth, earthy;" we see nothing but what relates to this material life, and we learn no lesson but that of the fearful profligacy of these bright Campanian cities. But amid the darkness of the Catacombs, we are reminded of that spiritual day which shone upon those who there made their home, and which now speaks out from the inscriptions on their graves. It is not alone a place of gloom and desolation. It reminds us not even primarily of death. Its dominant sentiment is that of immortality. From the distant past—from their rock-hewn tombs—we hear the voice of the buried martyrs, calling on us to rejoice and hope, because the darkness has rolled away from the sepulchre, and Christ has become to us, as He was to them, THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

V.

THE MARTYRS OF THE CATACOMBS.

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V.

THE MARTYRS OF THE CATACOMBS.

The places in the Catacombs which the members of the early Church regarded as invested with a peculiar consecration, were the graves of the martyrs. "The noble army of martyrs, praise Thee," was early chanted in the Church at Milan; and in accordance with its spirit, the followers of our Lord have paid their highest honors to those who, in this warfare of faith, led the forlorn hope, and fell victorious. In these days of coldness, indeed, we are startled as we read the glowing accounts of the early martyrologists. They love to exhibit the sufferer as sustained by a lofty enthusiasm, which rendered him almost insensible to pain — as being engaged in a conflict, in which he and the executioner were the combatants — "hinc martyr, illinc carnifex," as Prudentius expresses it. In his own dissolving powers, the martyr recognised the pledge of his victory. No group, indeed, of Oceanides were there to console the Christian Prometheus; yet to his upturned eye, countless angels were visible — their anthem swept sweetly and solemnly to

his ear—and the odors of an opening Paradise filled the air. Though the dull ear of sense heard nothing, he could listen to the invisible Coryphæus, as he invited him to Heaven, and promised him an Eternal crown.

It is in this spirit that Prudentius—to whom belongs the honor, at the beginning of the fifth century, of introducing poetry into the literature of religion*—makes his hero exclaim:—

Erras cruente, si meam
  Te rere pœnam sumere,
  Quùm membra morti obnoxia
  Dilancinata interficis.

Est alter, est intrinsecus,
  Violare quem nullus potest,
  Liber, quietus, integer,
  Exsors dolorum tristium.

Hoc, quod laboras perdere
  Tantis furoris viribus,
  Vas est solutum ac fictile
  Quocumque frangendum modo.

* Aurelius Prudentius Clemens was born in Spain, in 348. His most celebrated work is his book, Περι Στεφανων, "On the Crowns of the Martyrs." His poems are valuable, not only for the genius and poetic spirit they display, but as exhibiting also the customs and feelings of the Christian world at that day. Prudentius, however, wrote nearly a century too late. At the beginning of the fifth century (he did not visit Rome till the year 405), clouds were already beginning to darken about the pathway of the Church, and we can already find the commencement of those errors which, through the Middle Ages, so fearfully perverted the faith. All these are described by Prudentius with graphic fidelity, and we therefore turn to him as a witness for the opinions of the Church, when her early purity was fading away, and not as giving us a picture of what she was in her first and best days.

Tear as you will this mangled frame,
  Prone to mortality;
But, think not man of blood, to tame
  Or take revenge on me.

You overlook, in thus supposing,
  The nobler self that dwells within;
Throughout these cruel scenes reposing,
  Where naught that injures enters in.

This, which you labor to destroy
With so much madness, so much rage,
  Is but a vessel formed of clay,
  Brittle, and hastening to decay.
  Let nobler foes your arms employ;
  Subdue the indomitable soul;
Which, when fierce whirlwinds rend the sky,
Looks on in calm security,
And only bows to God's control.

Again, in another passage—for we can not forbear making a few extracts from one so little known, yet so admirable an exponent of the spirit of the age in which he lived—when describing the Proconsular records of the execution of Romanus, he takes occasion to compare them with the eternal records kept by Christ, commemorative of his servants' sufferings.

Illas sed ætas conficit diutina,
Uligo fuscat, pulvis obducit situ,
Carpit senectus, aut ruinis obruit;
Inscripta CHRISTO pagina immortalis est,
Nec obsolescit ullus in cœlis apex.
Excepit adstans angelus corum DEO,
Et quæ locutus martyr, et quæ pertulit:
Nec verba solùm disserentis condidit,
Sed ipsa pingens vulnera expressit stilo,
Laterum, genarum, pectorisque, et faucium.
Omnis notata est sanguinis dimensio,

Ut quanquam plagam sulcus exaraverit,
Altam, patentem, proximam, longam, brevem,
Quæ vis doloris, quive segmenti modus:
Guttam cruoris ille nullam perdidit.

But these the dust and damp consume,
And Time, in his destroying race,
Shall breathe upon the tragic scroll,
And every mouldering line efface.
There is a record traced on high,
That shall endure eternally;
On whose everlasting page,
Naught grows obsolete by age.
The angel, standing by God's throne,
Treasures there each word and groan;
And not the martyr's speech alone,
But every wound is there depicted,
With every circumstance of pain,
The crimson stream, the gash inflicted,
And not a drop is shed in vain.

Even the murder of the Innocents calls forth one of his most splendid efforts:—

Salvete, flores martyrum,
Quos lucis ipso in limine
Christi insecutor sustulit,
Ceu turbo nascentes rosas.

Vos prima Christi victima,
Grex immolatorum tener,
Aram ante ipsam simplices
Palmâ, et coronis luditis.

First fruits of martyrs, hail!
Whom in the dawning of Life's day,
The godless tyrant swept away,
As storm, the budding roses.
But now before the altar high
Each tender victim safe reposes,
Pleased in that dread vicinity,
With branch of palm and crown to play;
Though all unconscious of the prize,
Themselves, Christ's earliest sacrifice.

We learn, indeed, from various sources, how precious to the early Church was the blood of her martyrs. They felt, more than we can do in these latter days, the magnitude of the conflict through which they had passed, and the glory of the victory they had achieved. They looked upon them as conquerors, in the highest sense, over all the enticements of this mortal life, as well as the nameless terrors which gathered around their parting hour of agony. They esteemed, indeed, the "baptism of blood" the surest passport to the paradise above; and when Quirinus was sentenced to be drowned, Prudentius, in lamenting his fate, thinks it necessary to vindicate his claim to the honors of martyrdom, notwithstanding his death was without bloodshed:—

> Nil refert, vitreô æquore,
> An de flumine sanguinis
> Tinguat passio martyrem;
> Æquæ gloria provenit,
> Fluctu quolibet uvida.

> The deep cold waters close o'er one;
> Another sheds a crimson river;
> No matter; either stream returns
> A life to the Eternal Giver:
> Each tinges with a glorious dye
> The martyr's robe of victory.

From this cause, the very remains of the martyrs became precious to them. They gathered up all that could be rescued of their mangled bodies, with an enthusiastic feeling which was natural in those ages of simplicity and persecution; and so well was this understood among the pagans, that on one occasion, to disappoint them in their hopes, and to

add fresh pains to their bereavement, they threw the bodies of the martyrs of Lyons into the Rhone. Is it strange, then, that the resting-places of the martyrs were marked, and became, as it were, a nucleus around which other graves were gathered?*

Yet this expression of reverence gave no precedent for the corruption into which it afterward grew, though we can easily see how the change took place. The dividing line between a proper veneration for the relics of one who had shed his blood for the faith, and their idolatrous worship, was insensibly passed, men scarcely marked how; and when Prudentius wrote on this subject, the Church had already begun to wander far from her ancient simplicity. Yet so was it not in the early days when these martyrs were laid to their rest in the Catacombs. No hired mourners, as with the heathen around them, sent forth their sounds of wailing sorrow, but the true-hearted and the devout wept the untimely fate of those they might soon be called to follow. The places where they rested, were, to the surviving, consecrated shrines. They felt, as did St. Augustine, when, in his "City of God," he speaks of the bodies of Christians, as "vases which the Holy Ghost had lighted up with good works;" and in another place, he says, "the bodies of the saints are more glorious than if man had not fallen." Yet in all this we trace no feeling of superstition mingled with their reverence.

* The first twenty chapters of Arringhi's *Roma Subterranea*, are devoted to a discussion of the martyrs of the Catacombs.

Of the number of the martyrs we can form no estimate. We know that as one persecution after another swept over the Imperial city, each must have added largely to the lengthening catalogue of those who offered up their lives on the altar of Christian duty. For ages Rome was crimson with the blood of apostles and confessors and martyrs, thus realizing the figure by which St. John symbolizes the pagan city—"a woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus."* And such, too, is the representation given by St. Cyprian, in the middle of the third century, when, applauding the courage and constancy in faith exhibited by the Christians, he declares that the number of those who had suffered martyrdom was incalculable.†

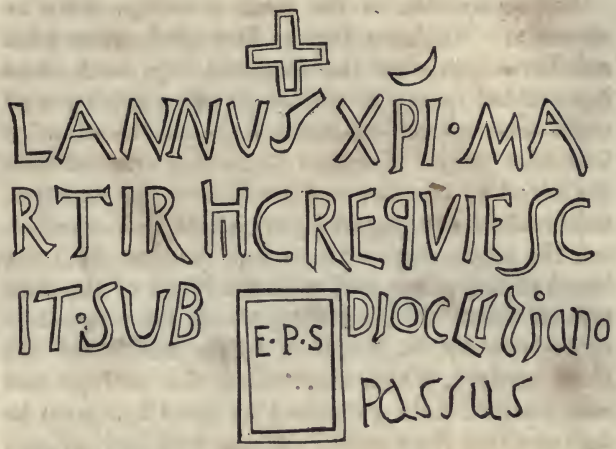
We have already said, that of but few among the thousands gathered here, is the manner of their death plainly mentioned. As, however, it may be interesting to see the way in which this is done in these few exceptions, we will copy several of them:—

PRIMITIVS IN PACE QVI POST
MVLTAS ANGVSTIAS FORTISSIMVS MARTYR
ET VIXIT ANNOS P.M. XXXVIII CONIVC. SVO
PERDVLCISSIMO BENEMERENTI FECIT.

Primitius in peace; a most valiant martyr, after many torments. Aged 38. His wife raised this to her dearest well-deserving husband.

* Rev. xvii., 6.

† "Exuberante copia virtutis, et fidei numerari non possunt martyres Christi."—*Lib. de Exhort. Martyr.*, c. xi.



Lannus, the martyr of Christ, rests here. He suffered under Diocletian. For his successors also.

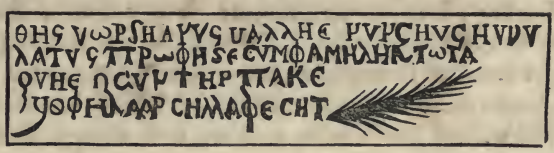
The letters E. P. S. are stated by Boldetti to stand for the words, *Et Posteris Suis.*

The next shows, from its concluding sentence, that it was erected during a time of actual persecution. It has, carved on its sides, the two most common emblems—the cross and palm branch.

TEMPORE ADRIANI IMPERATORIS MA
RIUS ADOLESCENS DVX MILITVM QVI
SATIS VIXIT DVM VITAM PRO CHO
CVM SANGVINE CONSVNSIT IN PACE
TANDEM QVIEVIT BENEMERENTES
CVM LACRIMIS ET METV POSVERVNT
I. D. VI.

In Christ. In the time of the Emperor Adrian, Marius, a young military officer, who had lived long enough, when, with his blood he gave up his life for Christ. At length he rested in peace. The well-deserving set up this with tears and in fear, on the 6th, Ides of December.

We give the fac-simile of another discovered by Arringhi in the cemetery of St. Agnes. It is difficult to decipher, but the rendering is given by him (lib. iii., cap. xxii., p. 337):—



Hic Gordianus Galliæ nuncius, jugulatus pro fide, cum familiâ totâ; quiescunt in pace; Theophila ancilla fecit.

Here lies Gordianus, deputy of Gaul, who was murdered, with all his family, for the faith; they rest in peace. Theophila, his handmaid, set up this.

These are specimens of the few inscriptions of this kind that can be found. There is another, a portion of which we quoted in the second chapter, erected to mark the resting-place of a martyr who was surprised at his devotions in the Catacombs, and found there his place of death and burial.*

* We have confined the discussion in these pages almost entirely to the Catacombs in the immediate vicinity of Rome, the inscriptions from which are contained in the Lapidarian Gallery in the Vatican, as we wished to speak on this subject, as far as possible, from *personal examination.* We find in some works, accounts of inscriptions, not in this collection, and discovered in other places under similar circumstances. For instance, at the town of Nepi, on the road to Florence, twenty-four miles from Rome, was discovered, in 1540, a natural grotto which had been converted into a cemetery for the first inhabitants of the place, who embraced Christianity. The graves are excavated in the walls, in the same manner as in the Roman cemeteries, and amounted to nearly six hundred in number. Of these, thirty-eight, it is said, were ascertained to be those of martyrs. A portion of the inscription over one, plainly sets forth the fact that he was beheaded:—

MARTYRIO CORONATUS CAPITE TRUNCATUS JACET.

—*Rock's Hierurgia*, 2d ed., p. 548.

But, we remarked, it was chiefly through emblems rudely carved on the stone, that later generations thought to distinguish the graves of those who actually shed their blood for the faith. Yet these have furnished abundant materials for discussion to the antiquarian. Among them is the ungula, or hooked forceps, which is usually regarded as an instrument of torture, some of which has been found within the tombs, and are now shown in the museum of the Vatican. Another is a hooked comb, which it is contended was used in tearing the flesh of the martyrs. On the other hand, it is asserted by some writers, that these instruments were the emblems of the trade or profession of him who is buried beneath; to inscribe these on the tomb, as will be seen in the next chapter, being a custom common in that day. On this subject we can not of course pretend to decide, but will only observe, that the former opinion is the one sustained by Arringhi* and Boldetti, and that these instruments are frequently mentioned in the "Peristephanon," of Prudentius.

The palm by itself, which is found on so many tombs, is now allowed by most writers to be no certain evidence of martyrdom. It was rather a Christian emblem, showing the triumph over sin and the grave, in which every true follower of our LORD had a right to claim his part.

Another is the cup, which was often found without the graves, and is so represented in some of the

* Arringhi devotes a chapter to the subject: "Martyriorum instrumenta una cum martyrum corporibus tumulo reponuntur."—*Roma Subterranea*, lib. i., cap. 29.

engravings we have already given. It was contended that this was placed at the martyr's grave filled with his blood.* But while in writers of that day we find abundant evidence of the care of the Christians in collecting the remains of their friends and the blood shed in martyrdom, it was that they might possess the latter as a precious memorial. There is nowhere a mention made of their burying it. Prudentius, in describing the eagerness of the friends of St Vincent to dip their cloths in his blood, gives as a reason, that they might keep it at home, as a sacred palladium for their posterity.

> Plerique vestem linteam
> Stillante tingunt sanguine,
> Tutamen ut sacrum suis
> Domi reservent posteris.†
>
> Crowds haste the linen vest to stain,
> With gore distilled from martyr's vein,
> And, thus, a holy safeguard place
> At home, to shield their future race.

It is curious, indeed, to see the different explanations which writers have given of the origin and meaning of this emblem. It is suggested, for instance, by Roestell, a view too which Raoul Rochette seems to take, that these were only intended to represent sacramental cups, showing the deceased to have been in all respects a member of the Christian Church and accustomed to unite with his brethren in that rite which showed their union with their departed LORD. This view is strengthened, indeed, by the inscription found on some of these cups. On one of them are the words—VINCENTI PIE ZESE (for ζῆσαις), "Vincent, drink and

* *Rock's Hierurgia*, p. 269. † *Peristephanon*: Hymn v.

live." This seems evidently to refer to sacramental purposes. Maitland, on the contrary, is disposed to adopt the idea, that these vessels were "depositories for aromatic gums," which, as we have already stated in a former chapter, were much used by the early Christians in the interment of the dead.

The consequence of all these discussions is, that the cup is beginning to be looked upon by antiquarians as being of very uncertain meaning. There is, too, a chronological difficulty connected with this subject. It is found in many tombs of so late a period as to be posterior to that of the persecutions, where therefore it is impossible that the individual could have been a martyr.*

Another difficulty is the youth of some of those on whose graves this symbol is found. For instance, Arringhi (lib. iii., c. xxii.) gives the inscription over a child of three years of age, which is accompanied with the cup. He could hardly have been a martyr.

ANASTASIVS QVI BIXIT
ANNOS TRES.

The furnace is also frequently found as an emblem. It is sometimes in this shape.

This is said by some writers to signify,

* "Some of these vessels, supposed thus to have been vessels of martyr's blood, have been found, on careful examination, to be of a form and make long subsequent to the age of persecution, and to exhibit signs painted or graven upon them which could not have been so graven or painted till after the times of martyrdom, inasmuch as they were not invented till years long subsequent."—*Mornings among the Jesuits*, by Seymour, p. 222.

that the individual suffered death by fire, or that these were caldrons filled with boiling oil in which the martyr was immersed. It is exhibited in another form in the following inscription:—

VICTORINA IN PACE ET IN CHRISTO.

Victorina in peace and in Christ.

These are the principal emblems which are supposed to point out the tombs of the martyrs. It will be seen that they are involved in great obscurity, and the only certain evidence is derived from the declaration of the fact in the inscription. But there is another truth connected with this subject, which is worth our notice. Perilous as were those times, how seldom do we see anything gloomy in the symbols or the inscriptions with which they laid their brethren to rest! They had too little for which to live, even to harbor a thought of hostility against those whose persecution separated them from this decaying life; and their visions of glory were too vivid to suffer them to lament the athlete of Christ, when he had worthily finished his course. The dismal pictures of martyrdom which now meet our gaze at every step, in foreign galleries and churches, are the productions of later days. They are the signs of a period when the spirit of the Church had become dark and gloomy.

Thus it is that "the noble army of the martyrs" rest about us in these dark retreats, and never until the Last Day will it be known with regard to many that they sacrificed their lives for the faith. Yet as long as they were remembered, their tombs were hallowed spots to those who came after them. The motto of the early Church was, VIA CRUCIS, VIA LUCIS. The heroes it reverenced were not the warriors whose laurels were gained on fields of earthly conflict with "garments rolled in blood," but those who like their Master, died that the faith might live:—

> "Strange conquest, where the conqueror must die,
> And he is slain that wins the victory!"

VI.

THE SYMBOLS IN THE CATACOMBS.

VI.

THE SYMBOLS IN THE CATACOMBS.

THE early Christians looked upon the fine arts with suspicion. Their noblest efforts had been so entirely devoted to the interests of paganism, in bodying forth the imaginary gods which in the old mythology peopled Olympus, that to the disciples of the new faith painting and sculpture were associated with "the worship of devils." "He paints unlawfully," was one of the charges made by the stern Tertullian against Hermogenes. Sculpture had led captive the imaginations of men, and they therefore dreaded its influence. A long time had to pass before this feeling was obliterated, and the fine arts with a new spirit came forth once more to minister in the service of the Christian faith.

The class of society, too, from which the earliest disciples came — the poor and the lowly — was composed of those who had no knowledge of the refinements of the arts. Not for them had been the pride and pomp of this world, but their lives were condemned to obscurity and toil. On them, therefore, the treasures of Grecian art were wasted, and

the most rudely-formed image, if it expressed the idea they wished to develop, was as valuable as the finest production from the chisel of Phidias. If it symbolized their faith, it was all they asked.

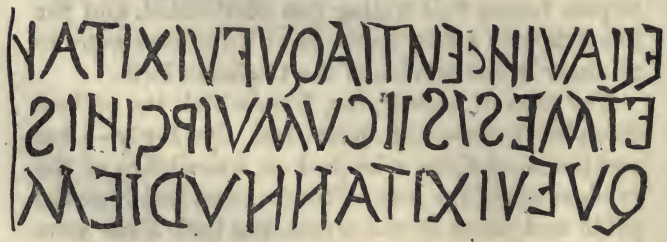
Of this ignorance of many of the early disciples, some of the inscriptions we have already copied to show other points, have given sufficient evidence. In many cases, the orthography itself is so faulty that it requires study to discover what must have been the original meaning. They were evidently the work of some who had not shared in the light of the Augustan Age. Such, for instance, is the following, which as a specimen of latinity is perfectly unrivalled:—

IIBER QVI VIXI QVAI QVO
PARE IVA ANOIVE I ANORV
M PLVI MINVI XXX I PACE

The probable reading is this:—

Liber, qui vixit cum compare
Sua annum I annorūm
Plus minus xxx in pace.

Still more singular is one in the Lapidarian Gallery, of which we give a fac-simile:—



Elia Vincentia, who lived — years and two months. She lived with Virginius a year and a day.

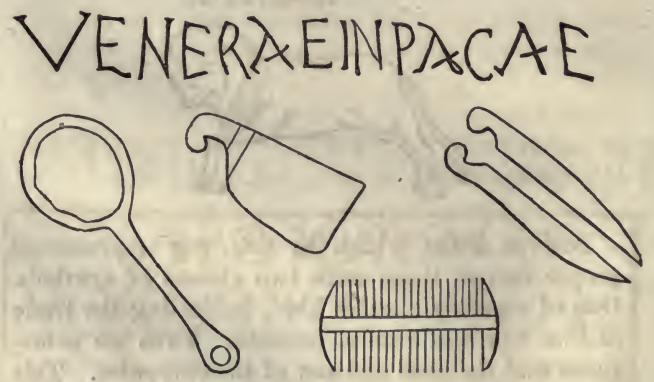
It will be perceived that the inscription is entirely reversed. To render it legible, it must be held before a mirror, and then its meaning will be as plain as can be with a sentence so rudely sculptured. Maitland conjectures that the stonecutter endeavored to take off upon the marble the impression of a written inscription, and the husband of Elia was too ignorant to perceive the error, or to procure a more intelligible record of his wife.

But this very ignorance drove them to some form of symbolism. They wished something to picture to the eye, and in their ignorance of language were obliged to resort to other representations. It is to this we must ascribe the rudely-carved lion on the tomb of Leo. The picture recalled his name at once to the unlettered survivors, to whom the words of the epitaph would have been unintelligible.

PONTIVS · LEO · S · EBIV
ET PONTIA · M
FECERVNT · FI

Besides those which in this way represented proper names, there were two classes of symbols. One of a purely secular kind, indicating the trade of him who was buried beneath. Thus we sometimes find the adze and saw of the carpenter. This was often the custom with the Romans, and at once

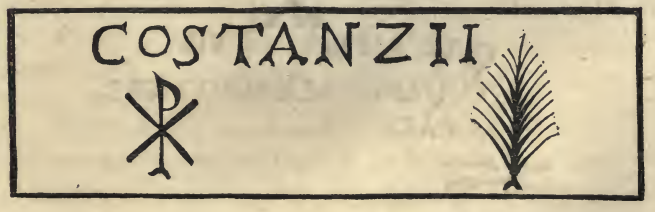
recalls to our minds the sphere and cylinder on the tomb of Archimedes, by which Cicero discovered the resting-place of the mathematician. We will give a single illustration of this, and the one which we select is chosen rather from the curious fate to which it has been subjected. In the successive irruptions of barbarians, which, as we have already described, inundated the Imperial city, and destroyed its antiquities and works of art, the slabs on which the inscriptions in the Catacombs were recorded, were often torn from their places and used for the most common purposes. One of these Maitland discovered built into the wall of a passage in the Piazza di Spagna, in Rome. It is the epitaph on a wool-comber, and we copy it as a good illustration of the point we would show. We have here all the implements of his trade; the shears, comb, the plate of metal with rounded handle, and the speculum:—



To Veneria, in peace.

But we pass from these cases, as they have no connection with the faith of those over whom they were carved. In addition to which, they are comparatively few in number.

The other class, and by far the larger proportion, refer to the profession of Christianity and those hopes which had so lately dawned upon them, and lived beyond the narrow grave which they had deprived of its terrors. Of these we naturally turn first to the CROSS, the primal symbol of Christianity, because it is the one most generally used. This emblem of our common faith is everywhere to be seen. Although so lately invested with the most humiliating associations, to the early Christians it became at once a mark of dignity and honor. Unlike but too many who, in this day, bear that holy name which was first assumed at Antioch, *they* gloried in the Cross. They used it as an emblem on all occasions during life—for with them the Cross explained everything—and it consecrated their tombs when the conflict of life was over, and they had exchanged it for the crown. But we postpone for the present any further discussion of this emblem, as in the succeeding chapter we shall endeavor to trace the changes through which its representation passed.



We often, too, meet with the monogram of our LORD's name, in what was undoubtedly its earliest form, the X and P, the first letters of Χριστος, united. For example, in the preceding and following simple inscriptions:—

BERPIO IN PACE

We copy one more for a peculiarity connected with it, which, however, is not uncommon in these early epitaphs. The primitive Christians seem often to have taken some tablet with a heathen inscription, and erasing it, to have placed their own in its stead. Such is the case with the following, where the whole of the original epitaph is not obliterated; but we still trace the D. M., standing for DIVIS MANIBUS, "To the Divine Manes," and two other letters, the meaning of which it would now be impossible to discover:—

HERCULIO. INNOCENTI
IN D-M

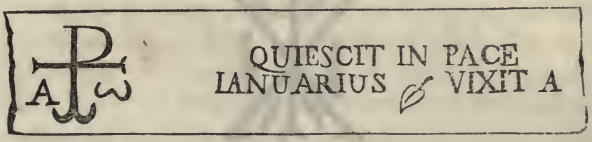
QV AN III VIII
JENUARIA ALUMNO MERE.
IN PACE

The monogram was sometimes surrounded by palms, which were much used in all these emblems, as being to the Christians symbols of victory and triumph. We find it, therefore, represented in this way:—

The next step was that the monogram was somewhat altered in form by the decussation (to use the technical term) of the X, to produce the form of a cross. The following figure, in which it is so represented, is copied from the tomb of a child, who died in his fourth year. The monogram here has become a regular cross, which a figure is holding:—

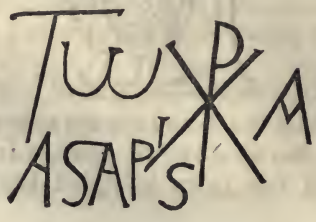
Subsequently the A and Ω were sometimes added, referring to the well-known passage in the Apocalypse, where our LORD is styled the Alpha and

Omega. The use of these letters is frequently mentioned by both Tertullian and Prudentius, showing how general in that age must have been the reception of the book of Revelations as a part of the inspired canon. These letters are represented in the following fragment of an inscription:—



There was a seal-ring found in the Catacombs, on which were engraven the same emblems, while the monogram seems to be sustained by two doves:—

Sometimes, probably from the ignorance of the sculptor, these two symbolical letters were inverted, as in the following rudely sculptured design:—



Besides these inverted letters, we have here the monogram, together with the name of the individual. It is to be read, therefore, "Tasaris, in Christ, the First and the Last."

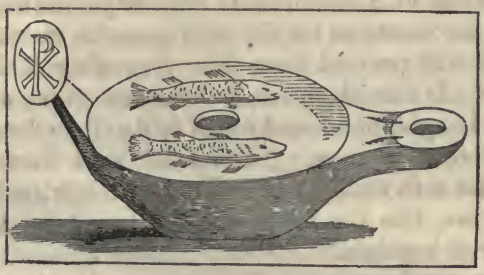
Next to these, one of the most common symbols was the FISH. It was a majestic sign in which the early Christians particularly delighted, not only because it was so expressive of the idea they wished to body forth, but because it was an emblem whose meaning their heathen foes would have found it impossible to detect. The idea was originally derived from the Greek word for fish, ιχθυς, which contains the initials of Ιμσους Χριςος Θεου Υιος Σωτηρ, JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, THE SAVIOR. Among the religious emblems which St. Clement (A. D. 194) recommends to the Christians of Alexandria, to have engraven on their rings, he mentions the fish, and remarks, "that such a sign will prevent them from forgetting their origin."* It furnished, too, a theme on which an oriental imagination found much to dwell, in detecting other resemblances. "The fish," says Tertullian, "seems a fit emblem of Him, whose spiritual children are, like the offspring of fishes, born in the water of baptism."

The word ιχθυς was often expressed at length in their inscriptions, and at other times the fish itself was figured.

We copy one of the earliest specimens, where it is given in its rudest form, the mere outline scratched upon the slab, together with the dove. Were it not by comparison with other inscriptions, we should not recognise the fish.

* *Pædag.*, l. iii., c. xi.

A better representation is found upon a lamp discovered in the Catacombs, where two fish are portrayed upon the upper part of the lamp, while the handle shows the monogram of our LORD's name.



On some of the tombs we find an ANCHOR pictured, of which Clement of Alexandria speaks as a Christian emblem. The association of ideas here is obvious. They looked upon life as a stormy voyage, and glad were the voyagers when it was done, and they had arrived safe in port. Of this the anchor was a symbol, and when their brethren carved it over the tomb, it was to them an expression of

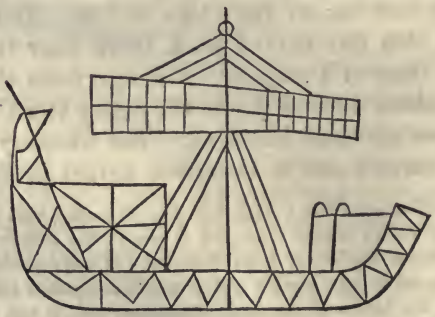
confidence that he who slept beneath had reached the haven of eternal rest.

A similar idea undoubtedly dictated the choice of a SHIP as one of their most common emblems, and which the Church of Rome has retained to this day.* It was supposed to be sailing heavenward, and they referred to the expression of St. Peter—"So shall an entrance be ministered unto you abundantly"—which they endeavored to illustrate by the idea of a vessel making a prosperous entrance into port. It was not a symbol confined to the Christians, but was with the heathen also a favorite emblem of the close of life. It may be seen at this day carved on a tomb near the Neapolitan Gate of Pompeii. Perhaps, from them the early fathers derived it, yet they gave it a Christian and more elevated meaning. The allegory of the ship is carried out to its fullest extent in the fifty-

* The writer once saw a miniature ship suspended from the beams of a little Indian chapel belonging to one of the Roman Catholic missions on the borders of Lake Superior. It was a perfectly modern ship in all its equipments, and as unlike as possible those represented on the tombs of the early Christians; still, it was the same idea they had inherited.

seventh chapter of the second book of the "Apostolical Constitutions," which is supposed to have been compiled in the fourth century. It is represented also on a gem found in the Catacombs, where the ship is sailing on a fish, while doves, emblematical of the faithful, perch on the mast and stern; two apostles row, a third lifts up his hands in prayer, and our Savior, approaching the vessel, supports Peter by the hand when about to sink. It was probably one of the signet-rings alluded to by Clement of Alexandria, as bearing the *νᾶυς οὐρανοδρομοῦσα*, the ship in full sail for heaven.*

Sometimes the mast was drawn as a cross, in allusion to our Savior. The following, in the Lapi-



* *Pædagogus*, lib. iii.

darian Gallery, is the usual form in which it is represented.

To show the way in which it was used in these epitaphs, we copy one, where the simple outline of a ship is given, while it is referred to in the inscription:—

NABIRA IN PACE ANIMA DVLCIS
QVI BIXIT ANOS n XVI M V
ANIMA MELEIEA
TITVLV FACTV
APARENTES SIGNVM NABE

Navira, in peace, a sweet soul,
Who lived sixteen years and five months:
A soul sweet as honey.
This epitaph was made
By her parents—the sign, a ship.

It was natural, however, that the most interesting symbols to the early Christians were those which were connected with the life and character of our LORD. In the primitive days of the Church, both in the east and west, "He was represented as an abstraction, as the genius, so to speak, of Christianity,"* and among all the drawings in the Catacombs there is but one form in which he is portrayed. It is as a beardless youth, to signify—the old writers tells us—"the everlasting prime of Eternity."

Perhaps the most frequent character in which He is introduced, is that of the Good Shepherd. He is represented in a shepherd's dress and sandals, carrying the "lost sheep" on his shoulders, while

* Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*, vol. i., p. 42.

his flock feed around or look up to him. Often, the landscape about is planted with olive-trees, doves resting on their branches, symbolical of the peace of the faithful. Eusebius tells us that Constantine erected a statue of the Good Shepherd in the Forum at Constantinople.* The painting which we have copied is from the cemetery of St. Callistus.

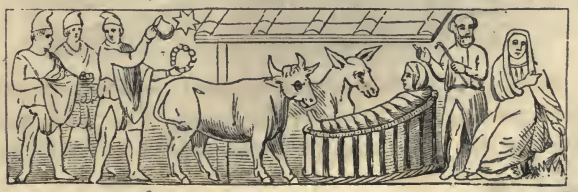
Another figure represents Him, a lamb with a cross on his head, symbolical of the Atonement, as

* *Vita Cons.*, lib. iii., cap. xlix.

standing on the rock or mountain of Paradise, from which gush out four rivers, emblematical of the Evangelists.

We now come to the scenes of His life. The Adoration of the Magi is a favorite subject of representation. In the following, from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus, the three wise men are portrayed wearing Phrygian caps.

In another case, on a sarcophagus found in the cemetery of St. Sebastian, of course of a much later date than the former, there is an elaborate bas-relief, in which the infant Jesus is represented lying in the manger with the oxen around him, while the Magi are approaching with their gifts, and the star of Bethlehem is seen above them. —



One of the most elaborate paintings in any part of the Catacombs, is a representation of our LORD's baptism, discovered in the cemetery of Pontianus. It will be observed, he is portrayed standing in the Jordan, with John the Baptist pouring water upon his head with his hand.

Another common representation is that of our LORD placing his hand on the head of a child and blessing it. The one we have copied is from the

cemetery of St. Callistus. We have placed by its side, our LORD conversing with the woman of Samaria at the well, taken from a sarcophagus in the Vatican. It is a scene repeated in many forms.

We frequently meet, too, with our Lord's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, the people with palm-branches and strewing their garments in the way, while Zacchæus, who is the unfailing accompaniment in this scene, is seen in the tree. With his early followers, this was not only an exhibition of our LORD's triumph in the days of his flesh, but it foreshadowed also his ultimate entrance as the King of Glory into the New Jerusalem. The following representation is the most elaborate we

have met with, and is taken from a sarcophagus in the Vatican.

The miracles of our Savior, however, were the subjects on which the early Christians most delighted to dwell. Strangely represented, indeed, yet always in such a way that we at once recognise the intention and design. In the following, our Lord is portrayed when "a certain woman which

had an issue of blood twelve years, came in the press behind and touched his garments; and Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned about in the press and said, "Who touched my clothes?"

There is another of a much later date, on a sarcophagus, which we copy on account of the accompanying views. It brings before us a specimen of Church architecture in the end of the fourth century, to which period the details of this picture enable us to refer it with tolerable certainty. We see before us a complete Christian basilica (apparently the same one repeated in several positions), with the circular baptistry at the side, yet detached from it. At the end of the building, on the right, we see the terminating absis. Before the doors hang those veils which are even now common in the Italian churches, to aid in preserving an equa-

ble temperature, and to which St. Augustine refers as used at the entrances of Pagan schools (as he expresses it), "serving to conceal the ignorance that took refuge within."

In the two on the preceding page, both of which are in the cemetery of St. Callistus, our LORD is touching the eyes of the blind man, and the man cured of the palsy obeying the command, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house."

The miracle of the loaves and fishes also frequently occurs. In the following, from the cemetery of St. Priscilla, the multitude seem to be kneeling with their eyes turned to our LORD, who, however, is not represented in the picture, as if just receiving the miraculously-increased food from his hands. At their feet we see the loaves and fishes, while in the lower part of the picture stand the "seven baskets full" that remained over.

As the Resurrection entered so much into their thoughts, it was natural that they should often bring forward the Raising of Lazarus from the dead. And it is curious to trace the progress of art with reference to this favorite scene. In the

first which we copy, it is merely scratched on the slab, just sufficient to represent Lazarus coming forth from the tomb, though, perhaps, it would be unintelligible, were it not for other representations with which to compare it. The second, though also rudely done, is executed with more care, while the figure of our LORD is introduced as summoning Lazarus forth to life. In all these he is intended to be portrayed as "bound hand and foot with grave-clothes."

The last one, from a later sarcophagus, is well carved, as far as each individual figure is concerned, though all rules of proportion are set at defiance in the relative size of our LORD, the mummy-like figure of Lazarus, and his kneeling sister. (See next page.)

There are numerous representations of the denial of St. Peter, in many of which we should be unable to define the subject, were it not for the accom-

paniment of the cock. The following is copied from a sarcophagus in the Vatican.

But among all these delineations there is not a single attempt by the early artists of the Church to represent our LORD's crucifixion, or any of those

sorrows which at the end of his pilgrimage gathered about the Son of man. They felt that they were subjects for solemn thought, not to be pictured to the outward eye. The most marked allusion to this subject is a lamb bearing a cross. It was reserved for a later age of superstition, to bring before the Church sufferings, on which our LORD's first disciples were contented to meditate with solemn awe. "The agony, the crown of thorns, the nails, the spear, seem all forgotten in the fullness of joy brought by his resurrection. This is the theme, Christ's resurrection, and that of the Church in his person, on which, in their peculiar language, the artists of the Catacombs seem never weary of expatiating; death swallowed up in victory, and the victor, crowned with the amaranth wreath of immortality, is the vision ever before their eyes, with a vividness of anticipation which we, who have been born to this belief, can but feebly realize."* Among all the scenes which accompanied the close of his ministry on earth, there is but one which is in any way brought forward in the Catacombs, and this is evidently rather commemorated by his disciples as a testimony to the innocence of their LORD, than from its connection with his sufferings. It is a mutilated bas-relief on a sarcophagus in the Vatican, representing Pilate, after washing his hands, uttering the declaration—"I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." The empty bowl is in accordance with what is still the custom at the East, that, when washing, water

* Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*, v. i., p. 51.

should be poured over the hands, so that it should not pass over them twice.

We now turn to the symbols taken from the Old Testament. These are numerous, yet most of them had a further object than merely to bring forward a scene of Scripture history. Those events were selected which they supposed to be typical of something in the dispensation which had just dawned upon them, and thus the Old and the New were linked together. It is a curious fact, indeed, that subjects from the Old Testament are repeated at least ten times more frequently than those from the New. "This peculiarity, whether it arose from reverence or fear, or want of skill, constitutes the most marked feature in the early Christian art of Rome, and distinguishes it in a very striking manner from that of Byzantium. While the Greeks

seem to recognise no medium between absolute symbolism and direct representation, Rome seems to have adopted from the first, and steadily adhered to, a system of Typical Parallelism—of veiling the great incidents of Redemption, and the sufferings, faith, and hopes of the Church, under the parallel and typical events of the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations."*

Beginning most naturally with that which represents the Fall of man, we copy a painting from the cemetery of St. Callistus. Adam and Eve are standing by the tree of Knowledge, round which the serpent is coiled. From the "aprons of fig-leaves" with which they are clothed, it is evidently after the act of disobedience had been consummated.

* Lord Lindsay's *Christian Art*, v. i.. p. 47.

There is another representation on a sarcophagus in the Vatican, where our LORD (as the representative of the Deity) stands between, condemning them, and offering a lamb to Eve, and a sheaf of corn to Adam, to signify the doom of themselves and their posterity to delve and to spin through all future ages.*

Noah in the ark is one of the most common of the earliest symbols. And yet, even in the barrenness of art in that day, there were no other subjects which displayed such poverty of invention. Often as it is used, the artists seemed never able to get beyond one form of representation. Noah is standing in a box alone, welcoming the return of the dove. His family, and the other numerous inmates of the ark, are omitted. The one we copy, on the following page, is from the cemetery of St. Priscilla.

* We copy this drawing from *Iconographie Chrétienne*, p. 100. Paris, 1843.

This was the invariable form. The artist seemed never to hazard an original idea, but contented himself with varying the position of the patriarch or the manner in which he is receiving the dove. This is shown in the two following, which are among the earliest illustrations of this scene.

But with the early Christians, this was a favorite subject. St. Peter had consecrated it to them as a type,* and to them it was an emblem of reconciliation and peace through baptism, while the ark symbolized the Church.

The sacrifice of Abraham was naturally often used, as being so admirable a type of that Greater Offering, where, centuries afterward, on that same mount, "God should provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." It is repeated in every variety of form, and, we are told by early writers, that Gregory of Nyssa frequently shed tears when contemplating this composition. We copy one from the cemetery of St. Priscilla.

We give another from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus, where the sacrifice has approached nearer to its completion, and the victim is already bound.

* 1 Peter, iii. 20, 21.

There are several scenes in the life of Moses which they were accustomed to repeat. One is, Moses on Mount Horeb, obeying the command, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." We copy one from the cemetery of St. Callistus. Another, from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus, is Moses receiving the Law, which was to be as a "schoolmaster to bring them to Christ." A third, from

the cemetery of St. Priscilla, is Moses pointing to the pots of manna, as shadowing him who spake of himself as "bread from heaven," and who gives us spiritual food, his body broken for our sins.

The one most often occurring, however, is Moses striking water from the rock, significant of spiritual

blessings derived to the Church through Christ. "And that Rock was Christ." We give two illustrations of this, of different ages. The first, an early one from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus. The second, from a sarcophagus discovered in the cemetery of St. Agnes.

In a few instances only, we meet with the representations of Job, sitting in his sorrow, as in the above, from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus.

One of the most spirited representations was the translation of Elijah, which to them was typical of the ascension of their Lord. We have selected one from the cemetery of St. Callistus, where the prophet, as he ascends in his chariot of fire, bequeaths his mantle to Elisha. It will be noticed that, at some later period, two tombs have been excavated in the wall on which this drawing is made,

obliterating the head of the prophet, and the lower portion of the other two figures.

The three children in the furnace at Babylon represented the faithful in affliction, and in their deliverance were a type of the Resurrection. In the following, from the cemetery of St. Priscilla,

they are portrayed rather at standing on the furnace, which some one is feeding with fuel below.

There is another in the same cemetery, as seen on the preceding page, which gives a much better executed representation of the scene, and where the dove is added, bringing to them the olive-branch, the pledge of peace and victory.

Daniel in the lions' den taught them the same lesson of suffering and deliverance. The scene is often repeated in the most spirited manner. Take,

for instance, the following from the cemetery of St. Marcellinus.

Still more so is the following from the cemetery of St. Priscilla.

We have reserved to the last of these scenes, that in the Old Testament on which the early Christians most loved to dwell—the deliverance of Jonah. Our LORD himself had mentioned it as a type of his own death and resurrection,* and it was, there-

* Matt., xii., 40.

fore, eagerly seized on by those who, meeting for worship where a thin slab only separated them from the martyred dead, were ready to aid their trembling faith by any symbol which could suggest a life to come. It is found, therefore, in every form — the storm — the monster of the deep swallowing Jonah — the prophet again restored to land, or sitting in gloom and anger under the vine which had grown up about him. There is, too, every style of execution, from the earliest representations rudely scratched upon the walls, to the more finished sculpture in a later age displayed on the sides of the sarcophagi. We give one of the former class from a broken slab.

In the following, from the cemetery of St. Priscilla, "the ship" is reduced to a boat, and "the mariners" to a single individual.

But it was not only our Lord's resurrection which was thus shadowed forth. It spoke to them also of their own course in this life, and in that which is to come. Sometimes, too, the Christian's whole existence was condensed, as it were, into one single view.

It would be difficult, indeed, for us to realize the trains of thought suggested to the early Christians, when they looked upon this single piece of rude sculpture in which, in defiance of all rule, the whole continuous history of Jonah was crowded into one scene. To them, the ship, the whale, and the gourd, represented the earth, the grave, and Heaven. And most beautiful was the idea as they shadowed it forth. Tempest-tossed for a time upon life's stormy sea, the tired voyager was obliged to descend into the jaws of the grave. There, for a season, like his LORD, he rested. Yet death was not permitted to retain him in its grasp. The grave "had no dominion over him." It must give up its prey. "Through the grave and gate of death, he must pass to his joyful resurrection." But then, when he has crossed the angry flood, he rests in security on the shore, while above him spread out the branches of the tree of life, its foliage protected him by its shade, while partaking of its fruit endowed him with immortal existence.*

In the cemetery of St. Agnes is a representation of the five wise virgins, as described in the parable. They are walking in procession, as they "went forth to meet the bridegroom." Each one has in her hand a vessel to contain the oil for her lamp, four have palm-branches, to denote that they are engaged in an act of festivity, while the first carries a *candela*, or candle made of wax, such as were used by the poorer classes in Rome, long after the houses of the more wealthy were lighted by *lucernæ*, or lamps. Plutarch (*Quæst. Rom.*) speaks of

* Rev. xxii., 2.

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their being used at marriages, and as they were borne in procession by the lower class, on the occasion of those festivities, they naturally introduced one of them in illustrating this parable. The lamps probably were lighted when they entered the house.*

* We were once looking over *Rock's Hierurgia*, a standard Romish work, describing the Sacrifice of the Mass, when, under the head of "Blessed, or Holy Water," we met with an engraving of this picture, with the following account:—

"A fresco-painting in the Catacombs at Rome attests the practice among the primitive Christians of sprinkling holy water at their religious assemblies.

[*Here follows the engraving given above.*]

In the Catacombs of St. Agnes out of the Walls. (See Bottari, *Roma Sotterranea*, tom. iii., p. 171, tav. cxlviii.)

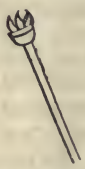
"On the ceiling of one of those sepulchral chambers, which have their entrance at the Church of St. Agnes out of the Walls are depicted five figures, each holding in one hand a vase, denominated *situlus*, similar to those in which the holy water is at present carried about in our ceremonies. Four of these figures support in the right hand branches, as it would appear, of the palm-tree; but the fifth bears elevated a tufted aspergillum, which exactly corresponds to the one which is still employed at the ceremony of sprinkling holy water."—*Rock's Hierurgia*, p. 463.

We would first remark, that Bottari did not write the *Roma Sotterranea*. It was the result of thirty years' labor by Bosio, and was edited after his death by Severano. It was translated into Latin, and again published by Arringhi, as the *Roma Subterranea*. Bot-

On some of the tombs we find a figure portrayed with the hands elevated in the act of prayer. It was one of the earliest symbols used, and remained unchanged even when repeated in the more finished fresco-paintings of later times. In this inscription, a female is thus represented, while a dove stands at her feet.

There were a number of other emblems pictured in the Catacombs, which were derived from allu-

tari wrote, "*Sculture e pitture sagre*" (see preface to this volume). We confess we were rather startled at this picture and its plausible exposition, as in none of our own researches on this subject had we found any trace of the use of holy water. However, we turned, as directed, to the *Roma Subterranea*, and there, at their own reference, we did find this picture engraved. But unfortunately for them, in this work, the joint production of several distinguished Roman writers, it is described as the five wise virgins. The "tufted aspergillum" proves to be a *candella*, while a few strokes of the engraver had rendered the flame more similar to a tuft. To give the title of the picture in the very words used in the *Roma Subterranea* — "Prudentes quinque virgines olei vasa cum lampadibus deferentes" (five wise virgins carrying vessels of oil with lamps).

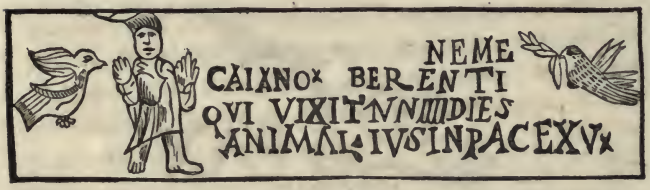


We have had some practice in detecting Romish frauds, yet we never remember to have seen one more beautiful than this in its design and execution.

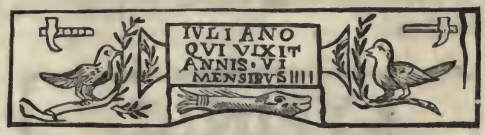
sions in scripture. Of these, the dove, as introduced above, was often used. It seems the most natural one that could be adopted, both from the recollection of our LORD's baptism, and from its character harmonizing so well with that faith in which it was a symbol. We wonder not, then, that it was used by the primitive Christians to embody their ideas of gentleness and peace. In some cases, indeed, the word PEACE is added, while the dove bears also an olive branch, derived undoubtedly from the history of Noah, as in the following.

As this was one of the earliest used, there is no emblem which is more rudely represented, as in the following.

In the following, the praying figure is also represented.



It is often united with other emblems, as in the following epitaph, where the fish also is portrayed.

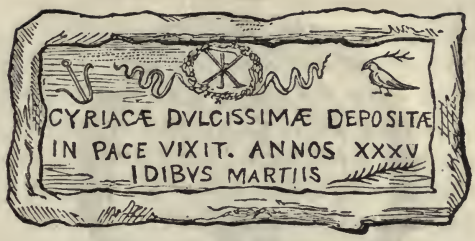


In addition to these were the PALM—which we have already noticed; the STAG, as represented in the picture we have given of the baptism of our LORD, by John, to show "the hart which thirsteth after the water brooks;" the HARE, the timid Christian hunted by persecutors; the LION, the emblem of the tribe of Juda; and the PHŒNIX and PEACOCK, shadowing forth the resurrection.

The COCK is frequently introduced as the emblem of vigilance, derived from the reproof of St. Peter, where we have shown it portrayed. On many of the tombs, too, we have the CROWN as the symbol of victory. The following is often its form.

It is here joined with the monogram of our LORD's name, as it is on this tomb, where it is also united with the dove. (See page 146.)

We have thus given all the principal symbols found in the Catacombs, to enable the reader to form a clear idea of those dark retreats in which



the infant Church of Rome was nurtured into strength and manhood. It is generally easy to tell the age of an epitaph. The earliest were invariably rude in the extreme, while they gradually improved as the Church became more free from persecution, and its members were enabled in peace and safety to lay their brethren to their rest. There is a wide difference, therefore, between the hastily scratched emblems of the first century, and the more carefully executed representations of Scripture scenes in the fourth. Yet, with regard to all of them, we can not but adopt the language of Lord Lindsay: "Considered as works of art, it must be confessed, they are but poor productions —the meagerness of invention only equalled by the feebleness of execution—inferior, generally speaking, to the worst specimens of contemporary heathen art. There is little to wonder at in this, when we remember the oppressed condition of the Christians at the time, and (I am afraid I must add) the poverty of imagination which uniformly characterized Rome, even in her palmy period."*

But it is with far different views from those of

* *Christian Art*, vol. i., p. 39.

artistic criticism that we have dwelt upon these symbols. It was in these illustrations that the primitive Christians wrote their creed, and we wished to show the purity and simplicity of their faith. Among these thousands of emblems and scenes, there are none which countenance the errors having their origin in later days, and which still deform the Church of Rome. The early Christians may often have been singularly unskilful in embodying the thought they wished to express, yet still the idea was right and in accordance with Scripture truth. Considering, indeed, the station and character of the early converts—looked upon by the rest of the world as "the offscouring of all things," just reclaimed from heathenism—listening to a teaching which was often interrupted, and whose benefits they enjoyed at the peril of their lives, it is truly wonderful how little of the errors of their lately-abandoned systems was mingled with their faith. But we see that these representations were not executed by those revelling in luxurious ease. They tell of times of peril and conflict. They show the purity of an age which was refined in the furnace of affliction, and in suffering and fear clung with steadfastness to the essential verities of the faith.

VII.

MINISTRY AND RITES OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

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We should naturally expect in the burial places of the early Christians, to find some recognition of the different orders of the ministry. Nor in this case are we disappointed. It is generally, it is true, a mere reference, for the inscriptions are too brief to admit of more. Yet these few words confirm the views entertained by the great body of the Christian world with regard to the polity and government of the early Church.

We turn first to the office of bishops. On the walls of the Lapidarian Gallery is an epitaph which clearly indicates this rank, by the use of the word Papa or Father, which in that age was applied to the bishops. For instance, in all the epistles addressed by the Roman clergy to Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, he is styled "the blessed Father (Papa) Cypri." We know not who the bishop was over whom this inscription was written, yet the reference to a *perpetual seat*, and the title *papa sanctissimus*, in the phraseology of that age show

episcopal rank. The consulship to which it refers fixes the date at A. D. 392.*

PERPETVAM SEDEM NVTRITOR POSSIDES IPSE
HIC MERITVS FINEM MAGNIS DEFVNCTE PERICLIS
HIC REQVIEM FELIX SVMIS COGENTIBVS ANNIS
HIC POSITVS PAPA SANTIMIOO VIXIT ANNIS LXX
DEPOSITVS DOMINO NOSTRO ARCADIO II ET FL
RVINO
VVCCSS NONAS NOBEMB.

You, our nursing father, occupy a perpetual seat, being dead, and deserving an end of your great dangers. Here happy, you find rest, bowed down with years. Here lies the most holy father, who lived 70 years. Buried on the nones of November, our Lords Arcadius, for the second time, and Flavius Rufinus, being consuls.

The following inscription (Arringhi, lib. iii., cap. iii.) records the burial place of one of the second order in the ministry:—

LOCVS BASILI PRESB ET FELICITATI EIVS
SIBI FECERVNT.

The burial-place of Basilus the Presbyter, and Felicitas his wife. They made it for themselves.

So also this, which we likewise copy from Arringhi:—

LOCVS VALENTINI PRESB.

The place of Valentinian, the presbyter.

In another case, there is a reference merely to the pastoral office of the departed:—

ACATIVS · PASTOR.

Acatius, the pastor.

This brief inscription is inscribed upon the tomb of one of the lowest order of the ministry:—

* *Maitland*, p. 185.

LOCVS EXVPERANTI
DIACON.

The place of Exuperantius, the deacon.

But there were other offices in the early Church, not always included in the ranks of the ministry, but often serving as a preparation for it. Such are the lectors, or readers, whose duty it was to read the Scriptures aloud in the Church. It was an honorable office to which persons of the greatest dignity were sometimes appointed. Thus, Julian, the apostate, was reader in the church at Nicomedia.* They were sometimes admitted to this office by a kind of ordination, as Cyprian speaks of one who had been a confessor, and whom he had "ordained to the office of lector."

In some cases, they were appointed at a very early age. Parents dedicated their children to the service of God from their infancy, and they were then trained and disciplined in these inferior offices, to prepare them for higher usefulness in the Church. Repeated instances are given of their being appointed at the age of seven and eight years, and a writer of that day, in describing the barbarity of the Vandals in murdering the clergy of Carthage, adds—"Among them were many infant readers."† At a later period this was altered, when by one of Justinian's Novels, it was "forbidden that any one be ordained reader before he was completely eighteen years old."

This explanation will enable us to understand the two following inscriptions, and particularly the

* *Socrat.*, lib. iii., c. 1. † *Bing. Orig. Eccles.*, lib. iii., c. 5.

youthfulness of the lector commemorated in the second. The Velabrum, where he was employed, is the part of Rome in which are situated the arch of Janus, and the Cloaca Maxima.

CLAVDIVS · ATTICIA
NVS · LECTOR
ET CLAVDIA
FELICISSIMA
COIVX.

Claudius Atticianus, the reader, and Claudia Felicissima, his wife.

LOCVS AVGVSTI
LECTORIS DEBELA
BRV
DEPSVRICA γ XGKAL γ
AVG γ
QVE VIXIT ANNOS
PMXII CONS
SEBERINI.

The place of Augustus, lector in the Velabrum, buried in a mound, on the 15th Kalends of August. He lived twelve years more or less. In the consulship of Severinus.

Another order in the Church in those days was that of the exorcists. We know, both from Scripture and the writings of the early fathers, that Satan in that age exercised strange influence over the bodies of men, while miraculous power was granted to the members of the Church, to cast him out. At first, it is supposed, this power was possessed by any of the followers of our LORD, as Tertullian challenges the heathen, that "if they would bring any person possessed with a devil into open court before the magistrate, any ordinary Christian should make him confess that he was a devil."*

* *Apologeticus*, cap. 23.

But with the withdrawal of extraordinary and miraculous power, which probably took place by degrees, and not at the same time in all places, the order of the exorcists became a settled one in the Church. We find this title given to an individual at the close of this inscription:—

IANVARIVS · EXORCISTA
SIBI · ET · CONIVGI · FECIT.

Januarius, the exorcist, made this for himself and his wife.

The order of the fossors is one less known at the present day. They were an inferior order of the clergy in the primitive Church, whose business was to take care of funerals, and provide for the decent interment of the dead, particularly of the poor; an office, whose duties, in times of persecution, were not discharged without peril. "The first order among the clergy," says St. Jerome, "is that of the fossarii, who, after the example of holy Tobias, are admonished to bury the dead."* They received their name of *fossarii* from their digging the graves. Useful as their office must have been in all parts of the Church, it was particularly so among those whose lives were so much spent in those galleries of stone, from which their last resting-place was to be hollowed out. We copy three inscriptions, in the first of which the word fossor has been misspelt.

TERENTIVS · FOSOR
PRIMITIVE · COIVGI
ET · SIBI.

Terentius, the fossor. For Primitiva, his wife, and himself.

* *S. Hieron. de Sept. Gradibus Eccl.*

SEELIX FOSSOR
IXIT ANNIS LXIII.

Felix, the fossor, lived sixty-three years.

MAIO FOSSORI.

To Maius, the fossor.

There were formerly many paintings in the Catacombs, the rude attempts of survivors to represent the occupations of those they had here laid to their last rest. Among these none were more numerous than delineations of the fossors, sometimes employed in excavating an overhanging rock, with a lamp suspended near them, as in the following.

One of them in particular, which was found by Boldetti, bears over it the inscription:—

DIOGENES · FOSSOR · IN · PACE · DEPOSITVS
OCTABV · KALENDAS · OCTOBRIS.

Diogenes, the fossor, buried in peace, on the eighth kalends of October.

It represents the fossor standing, surrounded by all the implements of his calling. In his hands are the pickaxe and lamp, the latter hanging by the chain and spike by which he was accustomed to suspend it to the rock. At his feet lay the cutting instruments and compasses, used for marking out the graves. He seems to be standing in a circular chapel surrounded by tombs; on different parts of his woollen tunic is figured the cross, and on each side of the arch above him is represented the dove with the olive-branch, the usual emblem of Christian peace.

We copy two more of these representations, selecting the most simple we can find. In the first, the fossor is portrayed digging with a spade. In the second, he is cutting down a rock.

There is another given by Arringhi, which contains his name and occupation. Here the word FOSROTFIMVS is supposed to stand for FOSSOR TROPHYMVS.

In the early Church, there was a class of females who, separating themselves entirely from all worldly interests, devoted their days to the service of God. Sometimes it was in widowhood; and it is to them that St. Paul refers, when he describes the qualifications necessary for those who would thus devote themselves for life to Christian labors: "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well-reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have re-

lieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith."* The council of Chalcedon forbid any to be admitted to the order of consecrated women, called in that age *ministræ*, under the age of forty. It is for such a one that the following inscription was written:—

OC-TA-VI-AE-MA-TRO-NA-
VI-DV-AE-DE-I.

To Octavia, a matron, widow of God.

Nor was this confined to those alone whose state was that of widowhood. For there were others, too, who were willing, in singleness and voluntary poverty, to forego the comforts of domestic life, that they might have nothing to impede them in their Christian labors. We can easily imagine, in a state of society like that of primitive times, when the rage of persecution was constantly rending the dearest ties, there must have been many whose only earthly hope was swept away, and who would gladly devote themselves for the remainder of their days to the self-denying duties of their faith. These are they to whose voluntary consecration to a life of sacrifice and toil the advocates of Christianity were accustomed to point, in comparison with the half dozen Vestal Virgins, the only parallel which paganism could furnish.† We copy an inscription referring to one of this class.

* 1 Tim., v. 9. † *Prud. cont. Symmachum*, lib. 2.

Furia Elpis, a consecrated virgin.

There is another of the same kind, given by Arringhi (lib. iii., c. xi., p. 272).

HOC EST
SEPVLCHRVM SANCTÆ
LVCINÆ VIRGINIS.

This is the sepulchre of the holy Virgin Lucina.

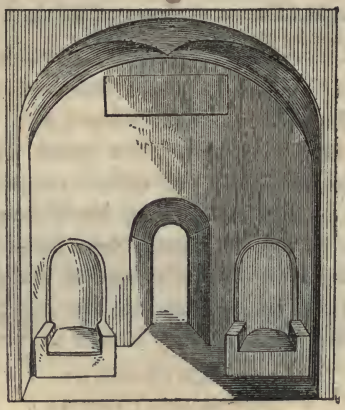
The following epitaph is that of a catechumen, for in primitive times the training of the Church began from the earliest age.

VCILIANVS BACIO VALERIO
QVI BISIT · AN VIII ·
VIII · DIES XXII CATECVM.

Ucilianus, to Bacius Valerius, a catechumen, who lived nine years, eight months, and twenty-two days.

In the Catacombs of St. Agnes are two curious crypts, which are stated to have been used for the training of the catechumens. Soon after entering this cemetery, we come to two square vaulted chambers, one of which contains a massive stone chair, which is said to have been occupied by the priest or catechist in giving instruction. In the

other, we find a chair on each side of the doorway leading into the inner crypts. They are hewn out of the solid tufa rock, while there is a bench of the same material running round the wall of the apartment. We give a view of the latter, copied from Arringhi (lib. iv., ch. xxv., p. 81).



Tradition states that this second chair marks the chamber set apart for the catechizing of females, and was probably used by the deaconess in whose charge they were placed. The position of these chambers near the entrance of the Catacombs, would afford the disciples easy access to their teacher, and these particulars combine to strengthen the view that these crypts were probably for this primary teaching given to catechumens.

We may, however, go a step further back than this; for in some of the chapels in the Catacombs fonts have been discovered, showing that the baptismal rite was performed in these secret retreats.

The following inscription from one of these in the Lapidarian Gallery, seems intended to convey the same idea as the words—"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins."*

CORPORIS ET CORDIS MACVLAS VITALI
·PVRGAT ET OMNE SIMVL.ABLVITVND.

The living stream cleanses the spots of body as well as of heart, and at the same time washes away all (sin).

But there is one important truth which we think we learn from these inscriptions, and that is, the fact of Infant Baptism. We meet with the epitaphs of children who are called neophytes, a title which, of course, could not have been bestowed upon them unless they had been received by baptism into the Church. The age at which they died precludes the idea of that rite having been administered to them in any way but as infants:—

ROMANO NEOFITO
BENEMERENTI QVI VI
XIT · ANNOS · VIII ·

To Romanus, the well-deserving neophyte, who lived eight years.

·FL · IOVINA · QVAE · VIX
·ANNIS · TRIBVS · D · XXX
·NEOFITA · IN PACE · XI.K.

Flavia Jovina, who lived three years and thirty days, a neophyte. In peace (she died), the eleventh kalends.

* Acts, xxii., 16.

TEG · CANDIDVS NEOF
Q VXT · M XXI · DP NON
SEP.

The tile of Candidus the neophyte, who lived twenty-one months, buried on the nones of September.

There is but one more custom of the primitive Church which we shall illustrate from these inscriptions. In those early ages, the followers of our LORD held at times a common feast where all met together as disciples of the same master, and intended to show the chain of brotherhood which bound them in one body. It was called the Agape, or love-feast. The spirit which originated it was beautiful, and in accordance with every precept of our faith, showing that "the rich and the poor meet together, and the LORD is the maker of them all." It generally either preceded or followed the administration of the Eucharist; and it is supposed to have been this connection which led to the abuses St. Paul condemned, when he wrote: "When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the LORD's supper. For in eating, every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry and another is drunken. What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?"* St. Jude, too, mentions it in the passage—"These are spots in your agapæ," εν ταις αγαπαις υμων—translated in our version, "feasts of charity."†

Tertullian, in the second century, in a single passage describes its object and the manner of its administration: "Our supper, which you accuse of

* 1 Cor. xi., 20. † St. Jude, v. 12.

luxury, shows its object in its very name. For it is called αγαπη, which among the Greeks signifies Love. Whatever charge we are at, it is a gain, as it is an expense upon the account of piety. For therewith we relieve and refresh the poor. There is nothing vile or immodest committed in it. For we do not sit down before we have first offered up prayer to God. We eat only to satisfy hunger, and drink only so much as becomes modest persons. We regale ourselves in such a manner, as that we remember still that we are to worship God by night. We discourse as in the presence of God, knowing that he hears us. Then, after water to wash our hands, and lights brought in, every one is moved to sing some hymn to God, either out of Scripture, or as he is able, of his own composing. Prayer again concludes our feast."*

As, however, the Church grew and extended, and the days of persecution passing away, crowds half-Christianized entered its fold from the heathen world, this simple feast degenerated into an occasion of revelry, which brought scandal on the faith. Therefore it was that St. Augustine uttered his indignant charge against some in the African Church —"The martyrs hear your bottles: the martyrs hear your drunken revels." In the fifth century, therefore, this rite was entirely abolished, as a custom unsuited to the altered condition of the Church.

In a retired crypt of the Catacombs of St. Marcellinus, is a rudely-designed picture (which we copy from Arringhi, lib. iv., cap. xiv.) representing this ancient rite, and more interesting to us, there-

* *Apol.*, cap. xxxix.

fore, as a relic of Christian antiquity, than the triumphal arches and trophies which remain of the faded grandeur of Imperial Rome.

In the foreground, at the end of the table, are seated two matrons, who preside, personifying Peace and Love, with their names written above their heads in the Etruscan fashion. At the table itself three guests are seated, while a page supplies them with food from a small round table in front, containing a lamb and a cup. The inscriptions are abbreviated, but should be read thus: "*Irene, da caldam aquam*" (Peace, give hot water);* "*Agape, misce mi vinum*" (Love, mix me wine).

The representations of these solemn feasts was often repeated, in both sculptures and paintings, showing how general in that age was the custom.

* The ancients always mixed water with wine. This was sometimes iced and sometimes hot. Thus Martial says:—

"Caldam poscis aquam, sed nondum frigida venit."

You ask for hot water, but the cold has not yet come.

It was founded certainly on an unworldly idea, and one which Christianity alone could have originated. Look then at such an assembly, as one by one, in silence and by stealth, they gather at their place of meeting. It is in the Eternal City, which is crimson with the blood of the earliest martyrs, and the name of Jesus of Nazareth is a forbidden sound within its walls. But scattered through its crowded thousands—even within sight of its Pantheon of gods—are the true-hearted, and joyfully they turn to their place of worship when the appointed time has come. Secretly they pass the gates, and steal across the Esquiline Hill, and descending into the Catacombs, thread their way through its narrow passages. The barriers of race and country—of rank and caste—are broken down, and for the first time in the world's history all are brethren. The swarthy Syrian is there—the slave indeed of an earthly master—yet here a freeman in Christ Jesus and a brother beloved for the faith's sake. Beside him is the intellectual Athenian, but he has learned a nobler philosophy than that of Greece, and found that the truest wisdom was to bow at the foot of the cross. And there, too, is the Jewish priest, shocked no longer by the presence of "they of the uncircumcision," but overcoming the narrow exclusiveness of his race, prepared to welcome the Jewish converts around him as inheritors of the same promises. It is an hour with them of holy joy, when the trials of the outward world are forgotten, its cares thrown aside, and their souls strengthened for that coming future in which they know not what shall

await them. And when they part, they realize that before they meet again, some among them may win the crown of martyrdom.

It would be interesting, did our space allow, to copy some of the figures in clerical dress portrayed in these frescos. We have mentioned in the first chapter, the resemblance which struck Mr. Cole, between these and the garments now in use in the Church. The resemblance is certainly much greater to our surplice and stole than to the short garment used under that name in the modern Church of Rome. We will give one as a specimen, taken from the cemetery of St. Callistus. It is of a priest in the attitude of prayer, and we think the fact we have mentioned will at once strike the most casual observer.

Thus it is that we glean from these memorials on the rock and in the caverns, the characteristics of the early Church. Yet while everything speaks

to us of trial and suffering—of a Church for which concealment in "the dens and caves of the earth" was necessary—all tells also of peace and purity within its own borders. The foot of pride had not yet come nigh to hurt its members, nor worldly prosperity cast its blight over the freshness of their early faith. And in this way it was, that the true-hearted learned their lessons of patience and courage, and were prepared to go forth and inherit the earth.

VIII.

THE CHANGES OF MODERN ROME.

8

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VIII.

THE CHANGES OF MODERN ROME.

The contrast is a strange one as we emerge from these gloomy retreats to the light and glory of an Italian day. The breath of flowers, as it comes up to us on the scented air, is doubly grateful from the hot, oppressive atmosphere we have breathed in these close windings. Yet how different the prospect which meets our eyes from that on which the early Christians looked, when in fear and trembling they came forth from these hiding places! The "Seven Hills" are there, and the wide plain still stretches out before us, and yonder are the purple Alban hills glowing in the beauty which has marked them for two thousand years; yet all else is changed. The Campagna, once alive with the habitations of countless thousands, is now desolate and waste. The marble temples of ancient Rome have passed away—the mouldering relics only are before us—and instead of the life and energy which marked the Mistress of the World, an air of venerable antiquity rests upon the city, and silence has gathered over the wide-spread landscape.

Yet stranger far than these outward and physical changes, is that which shows the mighty revolution which has taken place in faith, since Rome was the centre and home of the old mythology, and her soil was drunk with the blood of the early saints. The persecutors, for fear of whom the Christians then retreated to these dark crypts—where are they? There is the arch of Titus, whose sculptured panels tell the story of Judea's fall; and as we see the triumphal procession, and the captives bearing the sacred vessels of the temple amid their mocking conquerors, we learn how powerless have become the earliest enemies of the faith.

And where is the kingly power of Rome, from which came forth those edicts condemning the faithful to the wild beasts and the sword? Look at that hill, which lies between us and the walls. It seems covered with a mass of mighty ruins, as if destruction there had fallen on some splendid city and changed its stately magnificence to crumbling walls and prostrate columns. That is the Palatine Hill, and those are the ruins of Nero's Golden House; and there the trees twine their roots through marble floors once trodden by the Masters of the World, and the tall grass and rank weeds wave above them in wild luxuriance. A solitary building raises its white walls in the midst of all this desolation, hourly the sound of a bell is wafted through the air, and those who are lingering round hear a low chant borne faintly to their ears; for that is the monastery of the Capuchin monks, and their prayers and anthems have replaced the sensual revellings of the Cæsars.

And the ancient paganism, too, like the civil power which supported it, has vanished as a dream. There is the Capitoline hill, which once had its fifty shrines, yet no smoke ascends from its height—no altars are seen—the temples which once crowned it are gone, and their columns and precious marbles have been used to erect the Christian churches. Beside it is the church of S. Maria d'Ara Cœli, built on the foundation of the old Roman temple of Jupiter Feretrius, in which the *spolia opima* were deposited; and if it is the hour when the shadows of evening are beginning to gather, the vesper hymn of the monks will be borne plaintively to our ears. Below, by the side of the deserted Forum, are the ancient temples of Antoninus and Faustus, of Venus and Rome, now consecrated by Christian names to the use of that faith which has supplanted heathenism, while beyond, grand and solemn, rise the massive ruins of the Flavian amphitheatre. There Ignatius died, and the blood of countless martyrs enriched its sands, as they were "butchered to make a Roman holyday." But now, the once despised cross stands in the middle of the arena, and often the voice of some humble monk may be heard on that spot, as he preaches the faith of the Crucified, and his earnest appeals send strange echoes through those galleries, which once rang with the shouts of infuriated thousands, who were feasting their eyes on the torments of the expiring Christians. We turn away from these scenes, and the Imperial City is before us in all her solemn and venerable magnificence. Yet she has put off all trace of her heathen origin.

A wilderness of towers, and domes, and columns, are there, rising in the deep blue of an Italian sky —yet each pinnacle is gleaming with its cross— each edifice is devoted to the worship of Him, whom once it was death here to name with aught of reverence. And towering above all—on the very spot where once were Nero's gardens, and which witnessed the martyrdom of countless Christians—swells forth that miracle of art, St. Peter's dome, surmounting the noblest structure the world has ever seen, yet now the shrine of a faith before whose resistless march the ancient paganism of Rome was trampled into the dust.

Would that the contrast could end here—that we could speak only of the triumphs of this cause! Yet we fear a change has passed, also, over the spirit of the Church, and the faith now taught in the multitude of temples which adorn the streets of modern Rome, differs widely from that which the early disciples learned amid the recesses of the Catacombs. But on this point we are not left to mere speculation. The first generations of the faithful left behind them the evidences of their belief and practice, as the living inscribed above the dead the faith in which they were laid to their rest. These crypts, therefore, furnish a valuable chapter for ecclesiastical history, for we derive from them an unerring testimony with regard to the belief of those who first professed the Christian name in Rome. The early martyrs, by whom they were for a long while peopled, "being dead, still speak." They tell their own simple faith and devotion by the changeless emblems which are as ex-

pressive as words. And as we trace these pictured inscriptions down through successive generations, they unfold to us the gradual change which crept over the feelings of the Church.

We will take up some few of these in succession. A better illustration of this gradual departure from primitive simplicity can not be found, than that exhibited by the alteration which from age to age took place in the sign of the cross. To the Jew and the heathen, only the revolting instrument of the lowest and most degrading punishment, that to be feared by none but the basest criminal or the most wretched slave, the early Christians were able at once to divest it of all such humiliating associations, and it became the primal, and, for a long time, the sole symbol of Christianity. Yet we find it nowhere in the early inscriptions of the Catacombs, except as it has been already copied in these pages, in its simplest form of two straight lines. It is thus represented on this tomb.

If any addition is made, the same simple form of the cross is preserved, only it is represented as crowned with flowers, or with a dove, the emblem of peace. For in that age it was a token of joy—a sign of gladness—a pledge of the Christian's victory. It took centuries for it to become what the Church of Rome afterward portrayed it,

a thing of tears and suffering—a subject to enable the artist to display the height of intense agony. Yet thus, at last, it grew into a wretched representation of the Passion, in a crucifix with figure the size of life, smeared with the imitation of blood, and surmounted by a crown of actual thorns.

And yet, as we said, we can easily trace on the monuments of antiquity, the steps by which the cross grew into the crucifix and the bleeding agony of our LORD. The first addition was a lamb placed at its feet. The next stage was our LORD, clothed, extended on the cross, but not nailed to it, his hands uplifted in prayer. Then came the delineation of the sufferer fastened to the cross with four nails, yet still living, and with open eyes. It was not till the tenth or eleventh century that he was represented as dead. This is the progress of the change, as stated by Cardinal Bona, a view, the correctness of which has been acknowledged by most subsequent writers. It is a view certainly sustained by all the symbols in these crypts. "The Catacombs of Rome," says Milman, "faithful to their general character, offer no instance of a crucifixion, nor does any allusion to such a subject of art occur in any early writer."*

And the expression of our LORD passed through a corresponding series of changes. The erect head, sharing somewhat of the Divinity, by degrees drooped with the agony of pain. Then the face became wan and furrowed, and death with its deepest anguish was all that art aimed to portray. The Divinity had entirely faded away, and nothing

* *Eccles. Hist.*, lib. iv., c. 4.

remained but mere corporeal suffering—the earthly and the physical, deprived of all that was tender and sublime. But for this change we must look to the monkish artists of the Lower Empire, while those of the order of St. Basil introduced it into the West. It owed its form to the gloomy fancy of anchorites, who had brought it to a depth of degradation from which it required all the wonderful magic of Italian art to elevate it into sublimity.* To dignify their degrading and earthly conceptions it was necessary that a school of Christian art should arise, whose devotional style first gave character to the frescos of Giotto, and attained its maturity under the almost inspiration of Raphael—a school of artists, who

> "Never moved their hand,
> Till they had steeped their inmost soul in prayer."

But did not each step display a proportionate change in the spirit of reverence which had marked the primitive Church? Fond as the early Christians were of delineating the different scenes of our LORD's history, in all their pictures and sculptures, no attempt had been made to show his sufferings or death. They seem to have shrank from this with reverential awe. They often, as we have seen, pictured him as the Good Shepherd, bearing a lamb upon his shoulders, but never as expiring on the cross. They felt that this was a theme for holy meditation, but not to be shadowed forth according to the artist's earthly and degrading conceptions. Even when representing the three He-

* *Eccles. Hist.*, lib. iv., c. 4.

brew youths in the mighty furnace, on the plains of Dura, we notice that the fourth figure, "like unto the Son of God," is always omitted.

And was not that a loftier feeling which was content to worship him in his Divinity, while it shrank from coarsely delineating the corporeal pangs which weighed down his humanity? We feel, indeed, when we descend to the tenth and eleventh centuries, and see the Byzantine paintings in the cabinet of the Vatican library, representing our LORD as the "man of sorrows," covered with triangular splashes of blood, with a face indicative of hopeless anguish, that we have turned to a dark page in the history of Christendom. We have lost all that was ideal and divine. "The sky of sacred art darkened as the Savior's countenance, its proper sun, shed a more disastrous light over its scenes of wo; till the last glimmering of Divine Majesty suffered total eclipse from the exclusive display of agonized humanity."* Such is the wide gulf which in sacred art alone separates the ancient and modern Church of Rome.

So, too, was it with regard to the First Person of the Trinity. The primitive Christians never represented the Father in a human form. Nowhere do we trace any of that gross profanity—that absence of all reverential spirit—which now is seen in every gallery in Italy, where the Father of the universe is delineated as an old man with flowing white hair and beard. There are among the sculptures of the Catacombs only two instances where even a symbol is used to portray his pres-

* *Maitland*, p. 166.

ence. These are in representations of Abraham offering up Isaac, and Moses receiving the law. In the first of these, a hand stretching out from heaven and arresting his weapon, denotes the interposition of the Deity; while in the second, the hand is encircled by clouds, as if to show more strongly its symbolic character. These are found on sarcophagi, now in the library of the Vatican.

The early fathers would have shrunk with horror from the corporeal representations of "the King invisible,"* which now are to be seen on the walls of every Romish church—attempts to which we can not be reconciled even by the genius of Michael Angelo. Their prohibitions of any such visible representations of God, were most frequent

* 1 Tim. i., 17.

and explicit. M. Emeric David, in his *Discours sur les Anciens Monumens*, says, that French artists, in the ninth century, first had, what he calls "the happy boldness," *heureuse hardiesse*, to represent the Eternal Father under the human form. The earliest instance is contained in a Latin bible, now in the Cabinet Imperial, cited by Montfaucon, which was presented to Charles the Bold by the canons of the Church of Tours, in the year 850.* So many ages did it take for this irreverence to fasten itself upon the Church.

We realize, however, that we can not better dis-

* *Milman*, lib. iv., c. 4.

play the contrast between the awe with which this subject was regarded in primitive days, and the bold profanity which in later times characterized the Church of Rome, than by copying a picture of the sixteenth century. It was painted on one of the windows of the church of Saint Madeleine at Troyes.*

In this, we may say blasphemous piece, we see the sad change which had taken place in the feeling and practice of the Church of Rome. The scene is the creation of Eve from the side of Adam, while the Almighty is represented as an old man, arrayed in the robes of the Roman Pontiff, with the papal tiara upon his head.

Equally at variance with the Romish doctrine of the worship of the Virgin Mary, is every lesson taught us by the inscriptions in the Catacombs. Not a particle of proof can be derived from these retreats in favor of this error. No prayer is offered to her in the epitaphs of the early Christians. No *ora pro nobis* is addressed to one whom they regarded only as "blessed among women." Devotion seemed to rise too steadily to the Divine son to turn aside to his earthly mother. And when at length she became the object of the painter's art, it was only by successive steps that her image assumed a prominence among those objects of spiritual interest which enlisted his attention. It is doubtful, indeed, whether any delineations of the Virgin were executed before the fourth century, while it took two centuries longer to render them common. "We do not," says Saint Augustine,

* *Iconographic Chrétienne*, p. 224. Paris, 1843.

"know what was the countenance of the Virgin."* In the earliest pictures, as in those we have given of the worship of the Magi, the only ones we could find in the Catacombs, the Virgin is represented merely as an accessory to the Divine infant whom she holds in her arms. She is often veiled, and the highest attempt of the artist, is to throw around a figure thus covered as much grace and modesty as his skill will allow. In the oldest picture known, she is thus seated, in the calm majesty and dress of a Roman matron. It was long before this veil was removed, and she was shown, as now, smiling on the child before her, mingling in her looks the holiness ascribed to her, with that maternal tenderness which must have been so deeply incorporated with her nature. When that stage was reached, she began to be the inspiration of art, as the painter, striving after a divine idealism, was raised above all earthly models. Then it was that everything was added which could dignify the mother of our Lord, until her place in theology was changed, and she was exalted in a way for which the language of Apostles furnishes no warrant. The early fathers, in the words of Faber, spoke of the Virgin of the gospels, with their eyes fixed upon the mystery of the Incarnation; whereas Roman divines speak of the Virgin in Heaven, with their eyes fixed upon her assumption thither.

When the Virgin had begun to be invested with this dignity, the progress of the error was most rapid. The early reverence for her who was

† "Neque enim novimus faciem Virginis Mariæ."—*Augustin de Trin.*, c. viii.

"blessed among women," insensibly deepened into adoration, and she became an object of popular worship. It was a doctrine which suited the fervent temperament of the East, where first it originated; but there was none to which everywhere the heart seemed so to cling or which it embraced with such passionate affection. Of the Son, they could not think but in connection with "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity," there were often images of terror and sternness suggested by the view; but with the Virgin it was not so. All was gentleness and love when they turned to the Mother and Child, and there they found an object for those more earthly affections which mingled with their worship. The doctrine, therefore, became enshrined in the hearts of multitudes, and was developed in many a visible form in the rites and customs of the Church. It was a feeling, the workings of which a Christian poet of our own day has beautifully portrayed, when he says—

> "Some, I ween,
> Not unforgiven, the suppliant knee might bend,
> As to a visible Power, in which did blend
> All that was mixed and reconciled in thee
> Of mother's love with maiden purity,
> Of high with low, celestial with terrene!"*

Thus it was that an addition was made to the worship of the Church, but it was an error, the progress of which we can easily trace, and one which we have seen receives no countenance from all that we can gather from the records of the early Christians.

* *Wordsworth's Eccles. Sonnets*, xxi.

The fact, too, is equally evident from these inscriptions, that death was to them the admission into immediate joy. No visions of a purgatory clouded the dying gaze of the early Roman Christians. They looked upon the soul as going at once to a place of refreshing, by means of God's presence. Epitaphs like this abound:—

NICEFORVS ANIMA
DVLCIS IN REFRIGERIO.

Niceforus, a sweet soul, in the place of refreshment.

And is not this the same in its meaning as the following?

ARETVSA
IN DEO.

Arethusa, in God.

Another, in memory of a child, contains the declaration—

ESSE IAMINTER INNOCENTIS COEPISTI.

You have already begun to be among the innocent ones.

Another employs the following paraphrase to express the idea of death:—

ACCERSITVS AB ANGELIS VII · IDVS IANVA.

Borne away by angels on the seventh Ides of January.

And can we suppose that this expression, used by our LORD to describe the passage of Lazarus to the paradise above, was here intended to imply a conveyance to expiatory flames? Among the thousands, indeed, of these early epitaphs, it would be impossible to glean from any one a single expres-

sion which gives countenance to the doctrine of purgatory.*

So, too, is it with prayers for the dead. We confess, indeed, that on this point we looked for something which might not be in strict accordance with the teachings of Scripture, for we know that there is no error to which the mind of man seems more naturally to incline. When the loved ones of this world have been taken away, how gladly would the living preserve their connection with them, and follow them, if possible, with their prayers, even into the world of spirits! We should have expected, therefore, to find this sentiment developed in these inscriptions, even when it was the

* The difficulty felt by the Romanists in making out an argument for Purgatory, is shown by the course pursued by their writers. The fond expressions of affection (some of which, of a similar character, we shall quote in a subsequent part of this chapter) are seized upon and brought forward as *implying* a belief in this doctrine. For instance, the record of wishes like these:—

Aphthona! mayst thou live in God.
O sweet Roxanus! mayst thou rest well.
O Lea! mayst thou rest in peace.
Olimpiodorus! mayst thou live in God.

On these and similar inscriptions, we have the following commentary: "These exclamations, by expressing such an anxious, tender wish that those departed friends, for whom they are ejaculated, may repose in bliss, in reality betray some doubts about their enjoyment of that happiness, and thus exhibit proof that the pious Christians who uttered them, believed that the soul of the deceased might be in an intermediate state, where the efficacy of such aspirations could reach him, and his spirit could be refreshed and benefited by the supplications of his surviving brethren."—*Rock's Hierurgia*, p. 322.

It is left to the reader to estimate the force of this argument, bearing in mind, that it is the only one in favor of Purgatory which can be extracted from these records of the first three centuries.

offspring of a wish and a yearning of the heart, rather than of a settled and authorized belief. There was, too, a freedom of language in those ages of faith, when no error was yet to be guarded against, from which in these days men would shrink, when surrounded by misconstruction and heresy. The expression of feeling had not yet been restricted by the fear of evil to the cold rules of ordinary logic.

It is to be remembered, too, that through the first ages, the majority of those who found here their graves were not only the humble and the illiterate, but converts lately redeemed from paganism, and perhaps cut off before they had become grounded in any but the great essential doctrines of the new faith. And so were they who laid them to their rest, and wrote above them their epitaphs. We should expect, therefore, to find from them at times an expression of feeling, in which their love for the departed had caused them to exceed the bounds marked out by an authorized theology.

And when, too, the ages of purity had gone, and those of superstition gathered over the Church—when, as we have seen, through the Middle Ages a feeling of reverence induced many to seek there their tombs, the errors which had been developed in the Church would naturally find their place also in these epitaphs.*

* Maitland truly says: "To decorate the chapels, adorn by monuments the labyrinths of sepulchres, and pay an excessive regard to all that belonged to martyrs and martyrdom, was the constant labor of succeeding centuries. Hence arises a chronological confusion, which calls for caution in deciding upon the value of any in-

These considerations render more remarkable the fact, that we nowhere trace among these inscriptions anything which sanctions the belief that the custom of prayers for the dead was at all in use with the early Christians. Among more than three thousand monumental slabs arrayed in the Lapidarian Gallery by the papal authorities, the writer was able to discover nothing which sanctioned this error,* nor could he in the voluminous work of Bosio and Arringhi, the result of more than thirty years' labor. There is nothing which conveys the idea that they supposed any change was effected in

ference that may be drawn from these sources, respecting points of doctrine."—P. 14.

* We are informed by Maitland, that he found in this collection one single epitaph containing the phrase, *ora pro nobis.* He does not state, however, to what age it probably belonged.

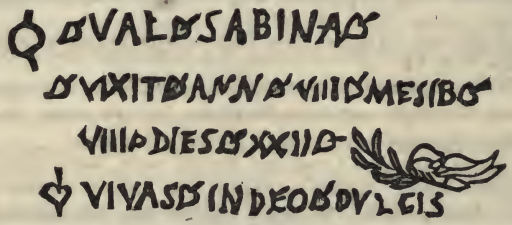
In *Rock's Hierurgia*, a standard Romish work, some inscriptions are given which contain a request for prayers for the dead. Where these slabs are we know not, for they are certainly not in the Lapidarian Gallery, where we should most naturally look for them. Nor is any information given us by which we can decide on their age. We have no proof that they were not erected amid the superstitions of mediœval days, when, as we said, we should expect to find them, as the Catacombs then were ornamented in the debased taste of the times.

The difficulty, too, felt by Romish writers in making out a case, is shown by their attempt to force a few inscriptions to declare what it is probable those who erected them never intended they should. For instance, in the *Hierurgia* (p. 244), we have a copy of this mutilated epitaph:—

JOVIANE VIBAS IN DEO ET
ROG.

Romish writers have discovered that the last half word should be completed ROGA, making it a request to Jovianus to pray for us, though it is done at considerable expense to the grammatical construction.

the condition of the dead by the petitions of the living. The utmost that can be discovered is an ejaculatory wish, the offspring a fond affection, which would thus pursue the object of its love beyond the grave. It is, however, rather the expression of a wish, than a petition for the departed soul. Some of these we have already quoted, when speaking of purgatory. We give, however, some further instances, and certainly nothing in these words can be construed into a support of the modern Romish practice on this subject.



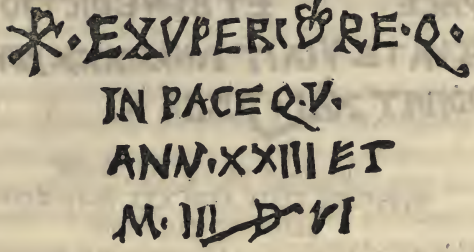
VALE SABINA
VIXIT ANNOS VIII. MENSES VIII.
DIES XXII.
VIVAS IN DEO DVLCIS.

Farewell, O Sabina! She lived viii. years, viii. months, and xxii. days. Mayst thou live sweet in God!

Still more forced is the following inscription:—

SIMPLICIO
VENEMEREN
TI. FILIO. TE-
IN PACEM
P. T. PR. N. S.

The meaning of the last line in this epitaph remained undiscov-



EXVPERI REQVIESCAS
IN PACE QVI VIXIT
ANNOS XXIII. ET
M. III. D. VI.

Exuperius, mayst thou rest in peace, who lived xxiii. years, iii. months, and vi. days.*

---

ered for many years. Some late writers have, however, ingeniously completed it thus:—

Pe Te PRo Nobi S.
Pray for us.

We think, indeed, it is the decision of common sense, that if this doctrine, so much in unison with many of the deepest feelings of our nature, had been held by the primitive Church, we should have found it written broadly and clearly everywhere through these epitaphs. Its proof would not be left to half a dozen inscriptions (and most of these doubtful and disputed), among thousands which plainly declare the reverse.

* We have copied this inscription from *Rock's Hierurgia* (p. 317), and given their rendering, to allow them the full benefit of it. It is one of the epitaphs from which they attempt to derive an argument for prayers for the dead. It will be seen that even with their translation it proves nothing with regard to this doctrine.

We would ask the reader, however, to observe how unwarrantable is the manner in which they complete it. What authority have they for filling up the word REQ., as REQVIESCAS, to make it read, "Mayst thou rest"? It might just as well be filled up with the present tense, for the sense would be much more in conformity with

INPACE ETBENEDICTIONE
SVFSVATE VIXIT ANIS XXXPLVSMINV
REDDIDIT XAL FEBR

IN PACE ET BENEDICTIONE
SVFSVATE VIXIT ANIS XXX PLVS MINVS
REDDIDIT KAL FEBB.

Mayst thou be in peace and benediction, O Sufsuatus! He lived xxx. years, more or less. He departed in the Kalends of February.

FAVSTINA DVLCIS. BIBAS
IN DEO.

Sweet Faustina, may you live in God.

BOLOSA DEVS TI
BIREFRIGERET QVAE VI
XIT ANNOS XXXI RECESSIT
DIE XIII KAL OCT. B

Bolosa, may God refresh thee. She lived thirty-one years. She departed on the thirteenth Kalends of October.

AMERIMNVS
RVFINAE · COIV
GICARIS · SIME
BENEMEREN
TI · SPIRITVM ·
TVVM · DEVS
REFRI · GERET.

Amerimnus to Rufina, my dearest wife, the well-deserving. May God refresh thy spirit.

In 1848, the Rev. Mr. Hobart Seymour, of the Church of England, was at Rome; and, through

the usual language of the epitaphs, if read—"The place of Exuperius. He rests in peace, who lived," &c. It is precisely the same case with the next inscription we have quoted—"In peace and benediction," &c.

CALIFORNIA

the intervention of a Roman gentleman who held some office at the papal court, he became acquainted with two members of the order of the Jesuits. They soon presented him to others. They introduced him to the professors of their establishment, the Collegio Romano, and thus a series of conversations or conferences on the subject of the points at issue between the Churches of England and Rome commenced and was carried on, as occasion offered, during the whole period of his residence at Rome. A portion of his notes of these conversations he has published, under the title of "Mornings among the Jesuits at Rome."

It was impossible that these arguments could be carried on without the Catacombs being appealed to as one branch of evidence; and we copy portions of the conversations on the subject of prayers to the dead, to show the utterly inconclusive nature of these Jesuit arguments, and the futility of their attempts to derive any proof from these inscriptions.

"On one occasion," says Mr. Seymour, "one of these Jesuit fathers referred to the inscriptions and figures graven upon the tablets as indicative of the fact that certain religious practices, against which Protestants objected in the Church of Rome, and which were made a ground of protestation and separation, were religious practices prevalent among those who were the saints and martyrs of the primitive Church. On my asking to what religious practice they especially alluded, one of my friends replied by referring to the practice of invocation of saints—praying to the saints; adding that there

was no doubt as to the existence of the practice, as it was evidenced in the inscriptions.

"I asked to what inscriptions and what words he alluded, as I had observed nothing of the kind.

"He replied by boldly stating that some of the tablets were inscribed with the '*orate pro nobis*,' or rather, correcting himself, '*ora pro nobis*.'

"I said that 'I had seen nothing of the kind; that I had carefully examined the great collection of inscribed tablets deposited in the Vatican; that some of them—indeed, the larger portion—had no evidence or trace of Christianity beyond a cross, or some anagram or emblem of Christ, as the Ship, or the Fish, or the Greek letter X, or the A and Ω, or some other of the various symbols of the Christian faith; that some commenced with the solitary word 'Pax;' some concluded with the words 'in pace' or 'in Christo,' implying that the person either lived or died in peace or in Christ—in the peace of God or in the faith of Christ; that I had observed many inscriptions stating that the person lived in peace, 'vixit in pace,' and only one 'vivas in pace,' expressive of the sigh or wish of the survivor that the person might live in peace, and very few others of the same import; and that, in the large variety of inscriptions which I had had an opportunity of examining, I had never seen or heard of more than one with either *ora* or *orate pro nobis*.'

"My friend replied that 'there was no doubt of the fact that there were such inscriptions, and that they actually possessed one in the college, and that he had seen the inscription, so that there could be no question as to the prevalence of the practice of

saying the *orate pro nobis*—praying to the saints to pray for us.'

"I reminded him that 'there were collected about two thousand inscriptions; that these were taken chiefly from the monumental tablets of the Catacombs; that they were cited as the representatives of the opinions of the primitive Christians; and that all he was enabled to say was, that among these two thousand he had seen *one* with this inscription! I then added, that, considering the heathens of Rome prayed to their departed heroes, it was no more than natural that some few of these, on embracing Christianity, more in profession than in reality, might ignorantly continue the practice, and pray to some departed saint; and that such an exception could prove nothing in favor of the practice; that so isolated an instance as one inscription could only serve, like an exception, to prove the rule, and the real wonder was that more could not be found; and the fact that more were not found among the thousands collected, proved powerfully that it was not the practice of the primitive Christians to inscribe the *ora pro nobis* on their tombs. The inference was that they did not pray to the saints.' * * * *

"He then went on to say that 'there was a marked distinction to be observed in the inscriptions on the monuments of the Catacombs. One class, he stated, contained such expressions as *requiescat in pace*—may he rest in peace—may he be refreshed, may he be comforted: all this class are the monuments of Christian persons generally, and these inscriptions are prayers for the dead. The other class are the monuments of martyrs, who pass at once into

the beatific vision of God, and who therefore do not need those prayers for their peace, refreshment, or comfort. Therefore those prayers are omitted; and this was the real cause of there being so many monuments without prayers. It was because there were so many martyrs.

"I said, that 'I could not assent to his ideas of either class; that the fact of there being no prayers *for* the dead or *to* the dead inscribed on the monuments, was to me an evidence that the Christians of those days neither prayed for the dead nor to the dead, and that this was a much easier way of accounting for the omission than supposing that all these were the monuments of martyrs—a supposition for which, as far as I could judge, there was not the faintest foundation. And as for the statement that the words *requiescat in pace*, and such similar expressions, were inscribed on the tablets, I could only say, I had never seen such among all I had examined, that is, among all the collection in the Vatican, a collection larger than all other collections in the world combined. Such an instance might be there; I heard there was, but I saw nothing like it; on one tablet, indeed, I had seen the natural and loving ejaculation *vivas in pace*—may you have peace!—and this appeared to me no more than a wish expressed to the dead, rather than a prayer addressed to God. I added, that I could only speak of what I had myself seen. It was possible he might have had larger and better opportunities of informing himself, and that he had probably examined them more closely; but that I apprehended there might be some mistake on his

part, and I would therefore feel obliged by his showing me some inscription of the kind.'

"The reply to this was, conducting me to several tablets, and pointing to one on which was rudely engraved or scratched the figure of a man in a kneeling posture.

"My friend, pointing to this, and observing that I was silent and could make nothing of it, said that 'there was a kind of monumental language well known and understood; that it was derived from a comparison of a large number of inscriptions; that when a tablet was found without a prayer for the dead, it was to be regarded as the tablet of a martyr; and that, as martyrs go at once into the vision of God, they do not need any prayers, and therefore no prayers are inscribed on their tablets; that, instead of such prayers, there was some emblem, as a representation of a person standing in the attitude of prayer, or as the figure of a kneeling man, that is, the figure of a man praying *to* the martyred dead, and thus embodying, not indeed the words, but the idea of the *ora pro nobis.* He said that this was a matter very well known and understood by those who were acquainted with the language of the monumental inscriptions.'

"I could not but smile at this statement. I had seen so many of these monuments without anything that could imply a prayer for the dead, that I had concluded thence that the primitive Christians did not cherish such a practice as praying for the dead in the age of the Catacombs; but my friend of the order of Jesuits assigned as the reason for so marked an omission, that 'all such monuments are

those of the martyrs, who were in no need of such prayers.' Thus variously do different minds look upon the same things.

"I remarked, in a doubting tone, 'that my friend seemed to regard the kneeling or praying figure as the representation, not of the martyr, but of some living friend.'

"He said, that 'the monumental language demanded this. A martyr could not require prayer, and therefore the figure could not represent the martyr himself; that it must therefore represent some one else, perhaps his friend, or relative, or follower, who erected the tablet, and who engraved his own representation on the tablet, to show himself in the act of praying to the departed and glorified martyr; that this was the well understood language of such inscriptions, and that I might depend on this interpretation.'

"I replied, that 'his process of reasoning did not strike me as very logical. He found tablets without prayers for the dead, and at once concluded that they were the monuments of martyrs who needed no prayers; and now he found the figure of a praying man, and at once concluded it could not represent the man buried beneath the monument, but the living man who erected the monument. I understood that the monument was always the monument of the dead; that the inscription was always with reference to the dead; that any picture, or image, or other representation, was designed for the dead, and that it was quite new to me to hear of their representing the living. I regarded it as representing the dead, and, ac-

cordingly, in the monuments of the Catacombs, such figures are always of the same sex as the dead person.'"

[In a subsequent conversation, at my own residence, with one of my friends from the Collegio Romano, this subject was renewed, and I was not a little surprised at finding a new and different interpretation given of this figure. It was then argued that the kneeling figure represented the buried dead; that it represented him as kneeling in prayer, and that it thus showed that the saints and martyrs in heaven pray, and that, as they can not pray for themselves, so they must be praying for us. In the Collegio Romano, the figure was said to represent the living; but at my own residence, it was said to represent the dead or departed. These inconsistencies are very frequent when arguing with different persons.]

"My friend replied, that 'I was quite mistaken in regarding the figure as the representation of the departed one, for that the known language of inscriptions required it should be the representation of the living Christian who erected the tablet; and it was designed to show his belief in the martyr's enjoyment of the beatific vision of God, and that he was thus praying to the martyr to pray to God for him—asking for the intercession of the martyr—really, an *ora pro nobis;* and it was thus a clear proof or justification of 'the Catholic Church,' in praying to the departed saints to pray for us.'

"I answered this by saying, that 'I could not think the figure represented the living Christian who erected the tablet; that such an interpretation

was forced and unnatural, for that it was the custom of all ages and all nations to represent the dead rather than the living on their monuments. I could not but think that the figure was designed to represent the dead, as one who had lived and died a praying man.'

"He at once caught at my words, and said, 'that if I regarded the figure as representing the departed saint, then I must acknowledge it as evidence that in the primitive Church they thought the departed saints prayed; and that, as they needed not to pray for themselves, they must be praying for us.'

"I said, that 'I did not regard the figure as representing the departed saint as praying for us in heaven, but as having been a praying man in his life; that as the words, 'in peace,' and 'in Christ,' implied that the departed had lived or died in the peace of God, and in the faith of Christ, so the kneeling posture might imply that he lived or died in prayer. I thought this the natural interpretation of the figure; and I said that in England, and, I believed, in other countries, and certainly in the Church of St. Peter, at Rome, the monumental statues always represent the departed persons; that it was usual to represent them, not as they were when dead, but as they were when alive; the warrior as a warrior—the orator as an orator—the painter as a painter—the clergyman as a clergyman; and I observed that all the monumental figures of popes and nuns in St. Peter's represented them as popes or nuns—represented them as they were on earth, and not as they are supposed to be in heaven; and that, in the same way, we ought to

regard this kneeling figure as representing the departed Christian as he lived or died on earth, a praying man. He was represented kneeling, to show he was a man of prayer—a Christian man. There is an example of it in Scripture, where the conversion of St. Paul is described in the simple words, 'Behold, he prayeth!'

"There was no direct reply to this."*

We think the folly of this reasoning, by those who are on the spot, and who have the best opportunities for establishing an argument from the inscriptions of the Catacombs, were it possible to do so, will show that they have no testimony to give in support of the errors of the Church of Rome. Mr. Seymour, indeed, in two concluding paragraphs, thus gives his own experience, so entirely in conformity with what we have already stated, and, at the same time, admirably sums up the whole argument:—

"Day after day, and week after week, have I paused in this gallery, to examine these monumental inscriptions. It always occurred to me, that if a belief in the sufferings of the dead in purgatory—if a belief in the efficacy of the prayers of the living in behalf of the dead—if a belief in the matter of fact of the departed saints praying for the living—if a belief in the efficacy of any praying to or invocation of the departed saints, was held among the Christians of the Church in those early ages, when the Church used to hide herself, used to celebrate her worship, and used to bury her dead, in the Catacombs, there ought to be, and

* *Mornings among the Jesuits*, pp. 223–231.

there should be, some evidence of such belief in the inscriptions so numerous to be found in the Catacombs. The absence—the total and perfect absence—of everything of the kind, seems to argue powerfully that no such things entered into the religious belief of the Christians of those ages.

"It is observable that in a modern grave-yard in any Roman Catholic country, there are always expressions in the monumental inscriptions which intimate the belief of the Church of Rome. There is a request to the passing traveller to offer a prayer for the dead; there is a statement setting forth that it is a good thing to pray for the dead; there is a prayer that the dead may rest in peace; there is a request for the assisting prayers of the saints. These and others of a similar tendency are found in every cemetery in Roman Catholic countries. But there is nothing like this—nothing that has the faintest resemblance of this, or of any opinion approaching to any of these—to be found among the innumerable inscriptions collected from the Catacombs. The whole collection of inscriptions thus argues unanswerably that those opinions that have been of late years so universally received in the Church of Rome were wholly unknown in the primitive Church."*

We will bring forward but one more error of practice in the modern Church of Rome, and whose claim to antiquity is entirely refuted by these primitive epitaphs. We refer to the celibacy of the clergy. For the first three centuries, no ecclesiastical law or regulation required the

* *Mornings among the Jesuits*, pp. 234, 236.

adoption of this practice.* Eusebius, in his history, often speaks of married bishops and presbyters; the council of Nice, in 325, confirmed to them this right; and Cyprian, in his account of the martyrdom of Frumidicus, tells us how his joy was increased at beholding his wife standing by his side in the flames, his companion in suffering and glory.

Such is the record of history. Yet how plainly is this truth confirmed, when over the tombs of the early Roman Christians we meet with epitaphs like these:—

LOCVS BASILI PRESB ET FELICITATI EIVS
SIBI FECERVNT.

To Basilus, the presbyter, and Felicitas, his wife. They made this for themselves.

The following epitaph on the wife of a priest, is given in Arringhi (lib. iii., c. iii.):—

LEVITAE CONIVNX PETRONIA FORMA PVDORIS
HIS MEA DEPONENS SEDIBVS OSSA LOCO
PARCITE VOS LACRIMIS DVLCES CVM CONIVGE
NATAE
VIVENTEMQVE DEO CREDITE FLERE NEFAS
DP IN PACE III NON OCTOBRIS FESTO VC CONSS.

Petronia, a priest's wife, the type of modesty. In this place I lay my bones; spare your tears, dear husband and daughters, and believe that it is forbidden to weep for one who lives in God. Buried in peace, on the 3d Nones of October, Festus being Consul.

What must have been the custom of the Church when these epitaphs were publicly set up! We believe, indeed, that those bishops, who, by their

* *Bingham's Orig. Eccles.*, lib. iv., c. v.

support of matrimony among the clergy, drew down upon themselves the indignation of Jerome, were introducing no new doctrine, but rather striving, in an innovating age, to prolong the early simplicity of the Church. The very spirit, however, against which they warred, showed that clouds were darkening the horizon about them.

We have thus dwelt upon a few points to illustrate the difference between the ancient Church of Rome and its modern successor. We unhesitatingly assert, that not one of the doctrines or practices, which we look upon as errors, can find support from these primitive records. With regard to many points, now much insisted on in the Church of Rome, the very silence of these inscriptions in the Catacombs is most conclusive. We feel, therefore, that in deciding on what is apostolical, we will take our part and lot with these early Christians, for in the very simplicity of their creed we breathe the freshness of primitive times. And in so doing, we are but adopting that rule of Tertullian—"Whatever is first, is true; whatever is more recent, is spurious."*

* "Perræque adversus universas hæreses jam hinc præjudicatum sit; id est verum, quodcunque primum; id esse adulterum, quodcunque posterius."—*Tertull. adv. Prax.*, Oper. ii., p. 405.

IX.

CONCLUSION

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THERE is a legend of the Eastern Church, which has been preserved, not only by its beauty, but because it embodies a melancholy truth with regard to the changes which a few centuries wrought in the early faith. The scene was laid at Ephesus, in the Decian persecution, which so severely tried the strength of those who then professed the Christian name. But while the storm was raging, and the stake and the arena were each day seeking new victims, seven youth fled from their adversaries, and sought refuge in a lonely cave in the neighborhood of the city. And there God permitted them to fall into a death-like slumber.

They slept on, in this miraculous way, without injuring the powers of life, while years expanded into centuries. One persecution after another passed by, till the rage of the adversary was exhausted, yet neither the sounds of sorrow or rejoicing broke their enduring trance. Christianity vindicated its claim to the dominion of the human mind, the faith was heard in Cæsar's palace, and

the imperial master of the world adopted the cross as his badge of honor. Then, at last, one of them awoke; but to him it had only been the dream of a night. He was ignorant of the mighty changes which had passed, and leaving his companions still slumbering, he cautiously crept from his hiding-place and entered his native Ephesus. There, he gazed about him bewildered, for centuries had left scarcely a familiar feature in his ancient home. A gilded cross over the city-gate by which he entered, particularly awakened his surprise. At length, with fear and trembling, he asked, "Whether there were any Christians in the city?"—"Christians!" was the answer, "we are all Christians here!" And then he learned how long his slumber must have lasted, and how mighty the changes, which during that interval had been wrought in the condition of the world. A "great gulf" separated him from the hour in which he had fallen asleep. He looked in vain for the once honored temples of heathenism, but saw them everywhere replaced by those dedicated to the worship of his crucified Master. He found the cross a hallowed emblem, and the gospel honored where before he had known its profession rewarded only with the crown of martyrdom. The home of the bigoted Jew was now a place of desolation—the Greek philosopher had acknowledged his wisdom to be foolishness, at the foot of the cross—and all that might and power of the Western world, which once guarded with such jealous care the rites of paganism, were now pledged to maintain the supremacy of the faith which had supplanted it. The

power of heathenism was broken, and all, from the emperor down to his lowest subject, professed that holy name which first the disciples assumed at Antioch.

His strange speech and antiquated garb attracted the attention of those he encountered, until finally he was brought before the præfect. There his story was told, and in amazement all—the magistrates, the bishop, and the emperor himself—followed him to his hiding-place. They found his companions still sleeping, and, in the language of the legend, "their faces had the freshness of roses, and a holy and beautiful light was about them."

At the call of those who had gathered in the cave, they too awoke; and we may imagine the strange, bewildering joy which took the place of all their fears. They felt that the Golden Age promised by their Lord had come, and righteousness was now to mantle the renovated earth. And then their thanksgiving was offered up, that they had been spared to witness these glorious times, and to spend their days where everything around them only ministered to devotion. But a brief experience dispelled these bright visions. They found that the world had been but Christianized in name. They looked in vain for the faith and devotion of those who were once their brethren, for these qualities seemed known but by tradition as the traits of an age of martyrdom. They found that expiring paganism, in its last convulsive struggles, had thrown its mantle over the power which conquered it, and in place of the pure faith of their early friends, they witnessed a distorted religion,

possessing little resemblance to that which it had supplanted. Forms, too, and ceremonies had been imported from the heathen world, until the simple rites of the first centuries were overloaded and obscured. And thus they turned away in sorrow from a world which called itself, indeed, by their Master's name, but retained so little the lineaments of the faith for which he died. The earth had become darkened to them, and they found they could live only in "the light of other days." And, therefore, in their weariness and sorrow, they turned once more to the cave, which for two centuries had been their resting-place, beseeching God to restore them again to that slumber which had been broken. And to the crowds which followed them, they exclaimed: "You have shown us many heathen who have given up their old idolatry without gaining anything better in its room—many who are of no religion at all—and many with whom the religion of Christ is no more than a cloak of licentiousness—but where, where are the Christians?"

And their prayer was granted. They had discharged the duty assigned them, and uttered the reproof for which they had been raised from their long slumber. Once more, then, they sank to rest, but now it was the sleep of death from which there was to be no awakening, until their Lord came again to visit his heritage. And thus their spirits went to be with those who had once rendered the earth fragrant with their footsteps, and whom they remembered as the teachers and guides of their early days.*

* In the latter part of this fable, we have followed the version

Transfer this scene to Rome, and we believe the fable would teach a melancholy truth. If a voice could now summon forth from their tombs in the Catacombs some of those who, in the purest ages of the Roman Church, were there laid to their rest, we believe that their disappointment on entering the Imperial city would be as great as was that of the sleepers at Ephesus. They would be able, indeed, to worship beneath gilded roofs, and find the most gorgeous structures in the world erected in honor of their crucified LORD; but the faith which there is enshrined would be widely different from that which they had learned in their living day. And this is the argument we have endeavored to present. We wish to show the wide interval there is in faith and practice, between the primitive Christians of Rome, and those who now dwell upon the Seven Hills—how long the way which the Church must travel back before she shall reach again the path from which she has wandered, or put on that "original brightness," which in the apostle's day caused her "faith to be spoken of throughout the whole world."*

The feeling with which we read these epitaphs is the same, in some respects, with which we study the epistles of the apostles. There is a plainness and manliness with which they appeal to the conscience of the reader, which he can not but at once appreciate. They speak directly to the heart, and bring forward those truths about which the affec-

given by Bishop Heber, rather than the usual legend. See *Mrs. Jamieson's Legendary Art.*

* Rom., i., 8.

tions and hopes can instinctively gather. They place man in direct communication with the Deity. No mediation of the Virgin or the Saints is mentioned in the Epistles, and we trace none in the inscriptions written by those who stood nearest to their LORD. We have to ascend from these dim retreats and enter the gorgeous temples of Rome's present faith, to find ourselves in contact with the manifold corruptions which ages of darkness have bequeathed.

The words of Scripture we believe to be clear and explicit against what we regard as the additions of the Church of Rome, to the pure doctrines of early times. And the testimony of history, too, is equally plain. From the ages of a dim and distant past, the voice of centuries comes down to us, rebuking the changes which superstition has wrought since apostles went to their rest. Yet nothing, we confess, has ever so deeply impressed us with regard to the reality of primitive truth and purity, as the study of these epitaphs. When the gorgeous services of the Church were passing before us in the Sistine chapel, and cardinals, prelates, and priests, in their richest robes, had gathered about the altar—when the most splendid music in the world was swelling through the lofty-frescoed arches, and sounding back from the porphyry pillars, so that it seemed as if the sublime anthem could almost, by its glorious strains, recall the dead to life—we have thought of the simple hymn of praise which once echoed through the dim chapels of the Catacombs, and wondered what those who then joined in it would have thought of all this show and pageantry. And when the hour of Ves-

pers came, and the sun gilded with his last rays the dome of St. Peter's, before he sank to his golden bed behind the Pincian Hill, and the stars came out in the clear blue of an Italian sky, as a thousand bells sent their chimings up through the darkening heavens and away over the desolate Campagna, we have remembered how changed was the service to which they summoned their worshippers —how prayers went up to saints and martyrs, "men of like passions with ourselves," instead of the one LORD, with whose name alone upon their lips these ancient saints had died, and it seemed to us as if Rome had again put on somewhat the garments of her old heathenism. Oh, solemn and mysterious city of the mighty dead! city, rich with the garnered dust of the saints, and more consecrated by sacred memories of the past than any spot on earth; but that holy city, where our LORD himself taught, and wept, and sorrowed, and from which he bore his cross up the Hill of Suffering, how art thou fallen from the glory of thy early youth! How often is the pilgrim obliged to turn away from thy shrines, because the teachings which they utter would have been strange to those who sat at the apostles' feet.

It is for this reason we are thankful that Rome thus bears within her own bosom, the proof of that early purity from which she herself has wandered —that the spirit of the First Ages is so indelibly stamped on the walls of the Catacombs, that no sophistry can explain away its force. There the elements of a pure faith are written "with an iron pen, in the rock, for ever;" and the Church has

only to look to "the hole of the pit whence she was digged," to see what she should again become. Would that she could learn the lesson! Would that, retaining the zeal with which she clings to the essentials of faith, and that wide-spread policy which embraces the whole earth in its grasp, she could cast aside the corruptions which ages of darkness have gathered over her, and use her mighty strength for the renovation of this fallen world. We look back with thankfulness to the hour, when the eye of Gregory I. rested on the captive Angles, in a Roman slave-market, and he planned that enterprise which was to infuse new life into the expiring Church of Britain, and our prayers go up, that the hour may come when Rome shall be once more linked in the bonds of a pure faith with that Apostolic Church, that side by side they may go forth to that struggle which awaits the true-hearted in urging on their Master's cause. But now, we feel that an impassable barrier separates us from the Church which sits enthroned upon the Seven Hills. We see too plainly the many errors with which she has deformed the faith, and it is therefore with a feeling of relief that we turn from the gorgeous services of St. Peter's, to the traces of a simpler faith in THE CHURCH IN THE CATACOMBS.

THE END.

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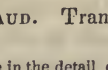

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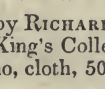

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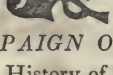

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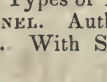

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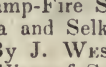

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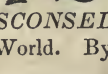

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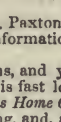

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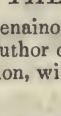

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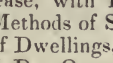

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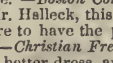

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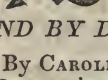

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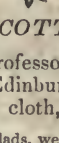

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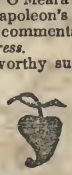

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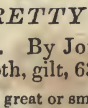

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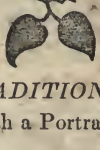

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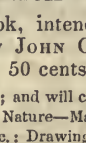

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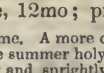

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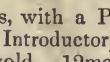

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